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CHAPTER I.

Concerning Love and Villainy.

"It is an extraordinary thing," said John Mansfield, the banker, as he leant back in his deck chair, with something approaching a sigh, "that even in the privacy of one's home, one can't get away from business."

The remark was addressed to a little group of individuals, who, seated beneath a shady verandah that looked out on a smooth, sunlit lawn, were indulging in afternoon tea.

Esther Mansfield, the banker's only child, a winsome, sweet girl who had seen some twenty summers, was presiding at the tea-table. The rebellious brown hair that clustered lovingly over her low, straight forehead, seemed to enhance the transparent clearness of her soft, white skin. The rosy glow of healthful youth was on her cheeks. But her chief glory lay in her eyes, dark, luminous, speaking eyes. One glance at her pretty face was sufficient to tell of a womanly, sympathetic nature, of a life hitherto unclouded by sorrow or trouble.

On one side of her sat Alec Scarsdale, Mr. Mansfield's confidential clerk, on the other, a Mr. Seaton Revelle, both of whom the banker had invited down to his country house on a Saturday to Monday visit.

Alec Scarsdale was a handsome, broad-shouldered young fellow of some twenty-six years, with a clean-shaven, self-reliant face, crisp, close-cropped hair, and clear, grey eyes. Clear-headed, frank, and outspoken, he had already won Mr. Scarsdale's confidence. The banker had been heard to say more than once, that Scarsdale was one man in a thousand. It was thought by some that before long the name of the firm would be changed to "Mansfield and Scarsdale."

But Scarsdale had won something more than John Mansfield's confidence; he had won the love of his daughter Esther. That afternoon, he had told her in simple, manly fashion that he loved her, and she, her blushing face hidden on his shoulder, had whispered that she returned his love, Then, when the first silence of joy had given way to speech, they had dared, as only lovers dare, to speak of, to limn the future, building fairy castles in the air.

They had returned to the house to find tea awaiting them. The presence of Mr. Seaton Revelle had prevented Scarsdale from speaking privately with Mr. Mansfield, and asking his consent to their engagement.

Seaton Revelle—John Mansfield had made his acquaintance some two years previously, while spending a holiday on the Continent—was, to all outward appearances, a well-bred, polished man of the world. There was a certain charm about his soft, musical voice, and rather indolent manner. But the indolence of manner was only a cloak; few people guessed the nature of the true character that lay beneath. He was singularly good-looking, and his black hair, slightly tinged with grey, gave an almost romantic expression to his clear-cut features.

"You don't mean to tell me," he said, "that people worry you over business down here, Mr. Mansfield?"

"I do, indeed," replied the banker, "why, only this afternoon, an utter stranger called on me—a bearded, sunburnt fellow, just home from South Africa. He was shown into the drawing-room, and, when I entered, he coolly unbuttoned his waistcoat, and took from round his waist a money-belt, stuffed with bank-notes and diamonds, and wanted me to take charge of it. 'That's my little pile,' he said, 'I'm bound to be in liquor before the day's over, and I might lose the lot. You're a banker, give me a receipt for it, and stow it away in your safe.' I explained that, though I was a banker I did business at my bank in London, not at my private house in the country."

A smile of amusement played about Seaton Revelle's lips.

"Yes," continued the banker, "and though I at first refused to have anything to do with his valuables, he was so persistent, besides being in no fit state to have charge of so much money, that I agreed to lock the belt in my private safe and return it to him on Monday. I have since learnt that he is the son of a farm labourer in the village. The old man recommended him to come to me. Four years ago he landed in South Africa with a few shillings in his pocket, to-day he has returned home with a substantial fortune."

"Extraordinary," said Seaton Revelle, as he stroked his silky moustache with a long, strong hand; "it will probably take him less than four years to spend it. Easily won, they say, easily lost."

"Oh, I hope not," said Esther. "Don't you think, father, you might speak to him seriously when he comes on Monday, and get him to invest it, or something?"

"I certainly shall. Consols—what do you think, Scarsdale?"

"It will be safe enough there," said Scarsdale, with a smile; "safer, even, than in your safe."

"Ah, don't you impugn my safe, young man," said the banker, with a laugh, as he rose to his feet. "Well, I suppose I must write my letters if they are to be delivered in London to-night."

"And that reminds me," said Revelle. "I ought to do the same—a nuisance, letter-writing."

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"I am afraid you are a very lazy person, Mr. Revelle," said Esther, as she watched him reluctantly draw himself out of the depths of the chair.

"In some things, yes," he replied, with a smile that showed his white teeth. "In others you would be surprised how awfully energetic I am."

So saying, he followed Mr. Mansfield through the open French windows into the dining-room beyond. Leaving Mr. Mansfield to write his letters in his study—a small room next door to the dining-room, Revelle went upstairs to his bedroom. He lit a cigarette and began to puff at it.

"Yes," he muttered slowly, as he inhaled the smoke deep into his lungs, and then let it slowly escape through his nostrils, "there's a small fortune in that safe. It's worth bidding for! Risky, pah! I've worked finer and more delicate jobs than this in the past. Banknotes and diamonds! Ten to one Mansfield never took the numbers of the notes; and diamonds, thank Heaven, don't have such things! I'm pretty hard up, and it's about time I brought off another *coup*. That affair of the Bond Street jeweller's shop paid well enough; but I spend money fast, and I don't believe there's twenty pounds to my credit at the bank."

And this was Mr. Seaton Revelle, a man to be met in the highest social circles, and whom popular rumour credited with a private income of some two to three thousand pounds a year. A man who led a double life; a man of iron nerve and cool audacity, utterly untroubled by such a thing as conscience, whose very daring contributed to his success.

The finely assumed air of languid indolence had left him as he stood for a moment with puckered forehead, mentally calculating.

"Yes," he continued, after another deep inhalation of smoke, "I shall want help from the outside. The stuff must be in London and turned into hard cash before the loss is discovered. Yes, Benny's the man for me—silent as the grave, honest as daylight, he's only wanting in originality of ideas, or he would be in as good a position as myself. I must drop Benny a line. Yes, I think it's going to work out very smoothly. Benny rides a bicycle!"

Tearing a blank sheet of paper from his notebook, he sat himself down at a table, and pencilled the following note—

> "DEAR BENNY,—I am meditating a little stroke of business. You can help me. To-morrow, Sunday, bicycle down to Warham—it's only eighteen miles from London—don't be later than three o'clock in the afternoon. See that your bicycle is in good trim, and bring your lantern and spanners. Put up at the "Crown and Cushion"; let the landlord casually know that you are returning to London *before five o'clock*. Then take a stroll through Warham Wood. You cannot mistake the bridle-path that leads to the reservoir. You will find me there. Now, remember, don't fail me. You know what to do with a letter of this sort. "THE MARQUIS."

Then, going to his portmanteau, Seaton Revelle took from it a plain envelope, and addressed it to "Mr. Benjamin Beard, 132a, Lambeth Road, London."

"Ah," he exclaimed, as he was on the point of sealing up the envelope, "I knew I had forgotten something."

Drawing out the slip of paper, he added a postcript—

"I have been sleeping very badly lately; bring with you a stiff dose of my own particular powder."

Mr. Seaton Revelle did not intrust his letter to the servant who carried Mr. Mansfield's correspondence, but, sauntering down to the village, posted it himself.

Meantime, after waiting till the banker had written his letters, Scarsdale had gone to him and had told him of what had passed between Esther and himself.

"Alec," said the old man, as, speaking with emotion, he gripped his hand, "you have my consent. God bless you! I am an old man, and I've dreaded the day when I must lose my little girl, but—but I'd sooner lose her to you than any man. There, you mustn't think me selfish. Alec, my boy, God bless you, and may you both be as happy as you deserve to be. Now send Esther to me!"

And Esther, a few moments later, with burning cheeks and sparkling eyes, glided bashfully into the room.

"Alec has told you," she whispered, as her father took her in his arms and kissed her. "I—I'm so happy!"

"You are quite sure you love him?" said her father, in a low voice.

"Oh, father, yes!"

The simple, telling words came straight from her heart.

Half-an-hour later the two lovers had left the house. The sun was already sinking behind the trees when they reached the edge of Warham Wood, and striking a bridle path, passed through to an open space that overlooked a reservoir, its artificiality concealed by the reeds and rushes that lined the banks. Nestling below them in a hollow, and girt about by trees, it might have been a tiny lake of Nature's, not man's design. Seated on the trunk of a fallen oak, his arm about her, her head resting on his shoulder—supremely happy—they watched the blood-red sun, tingeing wood and water with a flood of crimson light, sink beneath the horizon, then the afterglow—a memory of what had been, then darkness, the darkness of night.

In days to come, when anguish, doubt, and grief are tearing at their hearts, when the darkness of despair, like the dark night-clouds, is upon them, they will recall that brief hour of bliss with an agony of wild regret.

"Esther," whispered Alec Scarsdale, "tell me that I have your love for ever!"

"Yes, Alec, for ever!"

And the silent figure behind them, that had come upon them unobserved, hearing the whispered words, smiled softly!

CHAPTER II.

The Meeting in Warham Wood—Mr. Mansfield Feels Sleepy.

PRECISELY at three o'clock on the following afternoon, a bicyclist dismounted outside the "Crown and Cushion," an old-fashioned inn in the village of Warham, and some three-quarters of a mile from Mr. Mansfield's house. Having placed his bicycle in the stable, and having incidentally let fall that he was returning to London about five o'clock, the bicyclist inquired of the inn-keeper, one John Goodman of rubicund countenance, the way to the reservoir in Warham Wood.

Benjamin Beard, called by his intimate friends Benny, was a dapper, slim-built little man, with a sharp and rather fox-like face, and a pair of small, ferrety eyes, with a remarkably comprehensive range. In fact, it had more than once been remarked that Benny seemed capable of seeing what was going on behind him. In years, he appeared about thirty-five. He was neatly dressed in a Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers. In spite of his name, no hirsute appendage adorned his lip or chin, both of which had that bluish tint that comes from frequent shaving.

Having reached the wood, he struck the bridle-path, and, on nearing the open space from where, the night before,

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Alec and Esther had watched the sunset, he saw the figure of a man, who, a cigar between his teeth, was sauntering up and down.

"The Marquis," muttered Benny, quickening his step, "smoking his half-dollar cigar, the same old devil-may-care style, don't care a rap for anybody—truly he's a marvel. Well, I'm just busting to know what he's got on the cards; something big, I'll bet a sovereign!"

"Ah, Benny," said Seaton Revelle, as they shook hands, "glad you've turned up to time. Pretty spot this, isn't it? It also has the advantage of being quiet. We are not likely to be interrupted."

"What's the game, Marquis?" said Benny, his ferrety eyes a-gleam with curiosity, "I've been wondering when I should hear from you. You've practically done nothing since that little Bond Street job."

"I've been taking it easy," he drawled, watching the blue smoke curl upward from the end of his cigar; then, after a pause: "First of all, have you got that powder?"

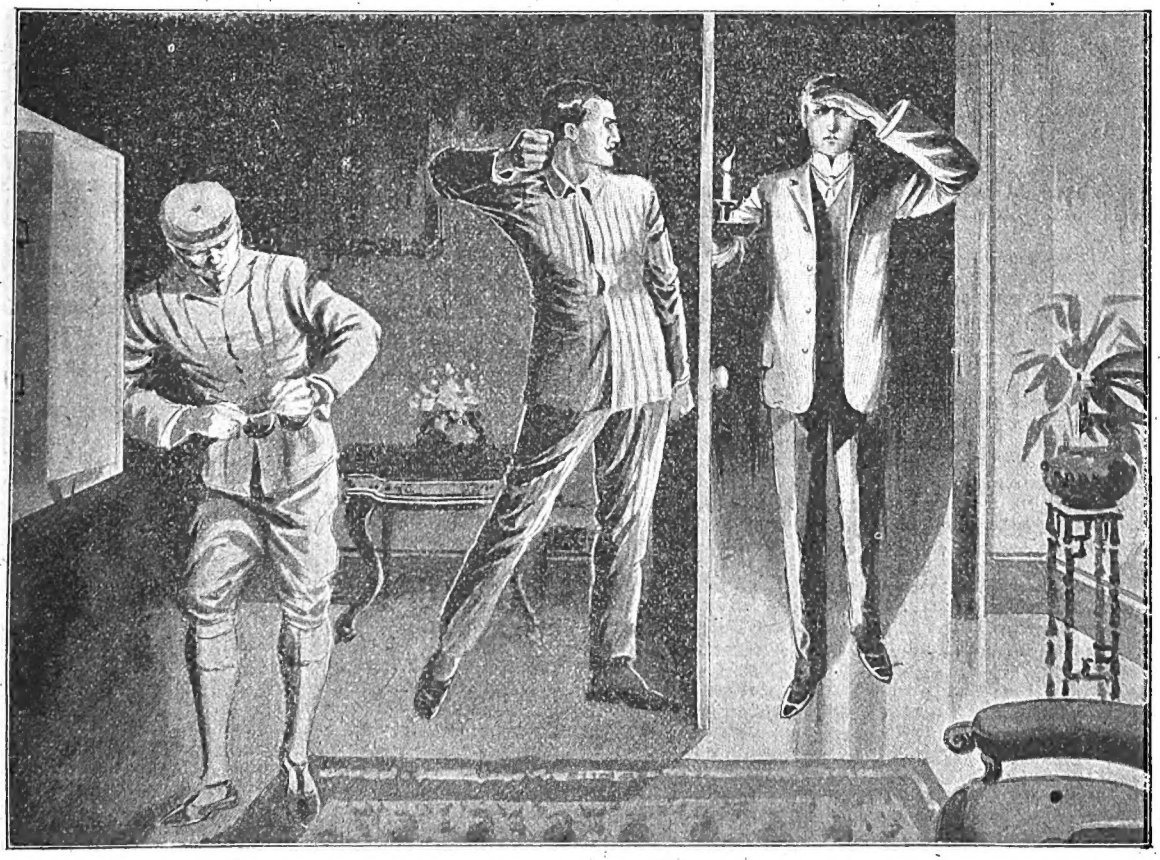
Benny drew a small packet from his pocket.

"Half of that, Marquis, is quite enough to induce sleep. Don't use more; it might be risky. But, for Heaven's sake! let's have the details. I'm on tenter-hooks."

Seaton Revelle gave a quick glance round, and then briefly related the incident of the returned traveller from South Africa and his money-belt.

"But it's stowed away in a safe," said Benny, dubiously, "and you know what a business it is to crack a modern safe. Why, we haven't the proper tools."

"My dear Benny," said Revelle, a slight touch of contempt in his voice, "why don't you use your brains, and think. It's not a question of breaking open the safe; only unlocking it, taking out the belt, and locking it up again. Mansfield carries the key about him. He always takes a 'night-cap' before doing to bed. I shall put half that powder in his whisky. I sleep on the same floor as he does. I shall get that key, slip down and let you in through the dining-room window. You must conceal your bicycle by the side of the road. Once you've got the belt, you must ride for all you're worth to London. I shall lock up the window, slip back the key, and go quietly to bed. There will be absolutely no clue to what has taken place, till Mansfield opens the safe. That may not be till mid-day."



The next instant Alec Scarsdale, fully dressed, carrying a candle in one hand and shading his eyes with the other, crossed the threshold.

Benny's small eyes shone with admiration.

"Marquis, you're a marvel. It's simplicity itself."

"Simplicity and success," said Seaton Revelle, knocking the ash off the end of his cigar, "as a rule go together."

"And what's my share to be," asked Benny

"One-third; I think that's fair."

"Quite," said Benny, almost humbly.

"Now," continued Revelle, "Mansfield's house is the first house on the road after you leave the village. A pathway leads from the front to the back—gravel. What about your boots?"

Benny winked, and turned up one of his feet; his bicycle shoes had rubber soles.

"Good—at two o'clock precisely, not a second later, you must be outside the French windows that look on to the lawn. Now get back to the inn; start off as if for London, then fill in the time as best you can, only don't be seen pottering about, and be outside the French windows at two o'clock to-night, or rather, to-morrow morning."

"Well, ta-ta, Marquis, till to-night!"

"Till to-night, Benny!"

For some time Seaton Revelle stood alone, wrapped in contemplation. He had dismissed the intended burglary from his mind. He was thinking of Esther's engagement to Alec Scarsdale. The night before, when they had returned from their walk, utterly unconscious that there had been another person besides themselves in the wood, he had congratulated them both, no sign on his handsome, smooth face of the inward rankling. Apart from the fact that Esther was an heiress, she had attracted him. He was a man, whose daring audacity knew no bounds. It would have been no bad move to have gradually cut himself away from the old life, marry Esther and her fortune, and settle down to a comfortable life of luxury. But now, Scarsdale barred the way.

"Confound the fellow," he muttered, as he sauntered back to the house, "he's stolen a march on me. But—well, we shall see!"

That evening, after Esther had retired to bed, the three gentlemen sat in the smoking room, enjoying their cigars, and a chat, before turning in. On a bureau in one corner stood a tray with decanters of spirits and syphons of soda-water upon it.

"Alec," said the banker, "it's about time I had my 'night-cap.' Be a good fellow, and mix it for me—you know my dose!"

Scarsdale went to the bureau, and, his back turned, mixed the drink. He was some little time, the first syphon that he essayed, refusing to work properly. Then, having handed the glass to the banker, he turned to Seaton Revelle:

"Shall I mix you one?"

"Thanks, very good of you; a very little whisky, please,"

Revelle was sitting next to Mr. Mansfield, who was leaning back in a low chair, and, after sipping his whisky, he placed his glass on the floor.

Revelle abstractedly thrust a hand into his waistcoat pocket, then, withdrawing it, allowed it to dangle between his chair and Mr. Mansfield's, and immediately over the glass below.

At the same time, with his other hand, he politely suppressed a yawn.

A quarter of an hour later, his whisky finished, Mr. Mansfield, in his turn, stifled a yawn, and glanced at the clock.

"Well, gentlemen, I don't know how you feel, but I'm feeling remarkably sleepy. What do you say to turning in?"

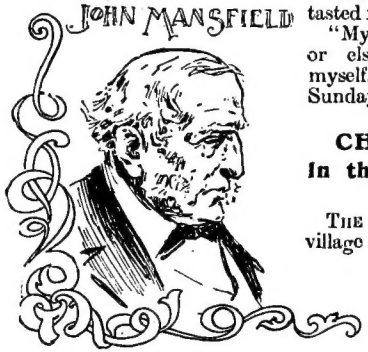
Again he suppressed a yawn, and then made a movement with his lips as if a strange taste was in his mouth.

"I say, Alec, what have you been doing with the whisky? It's left a curious taste in my mouth."

Seaton Revelle was coolly contemplating the massive signet ring on his little finger. Scarsdale laughed.

"I don't know. Mine tasted right enough."

"My imagination, perhaps, or else I've over-smoked myself. I generally do on Sundays."



CHAPTER III.

In the Silence of the Night.

The solitary note of the village clock, striking the half-hour, had died away, and the death-like silence that pervaded the deserted road from Warham village to Mr. Mansfield's house was only broken by the faint whirr of a bicycle. Though the night was dark and starless, the cyclist rode with an unlighted lamp. Fifty yards from Mr. Mansfield's house he dismounted, and noiselessly concealed a machine in the edge that lined the road. Then, having reached the house, no lights shining out from the shuttered windows, he silently passed down a path leading through a shrubbery to the lawn at the back. For twenty minutes, never stirring, scarcely breathing, he stood by the dining-room windows, completely enshrouded in a deep shadow.

Cool hand as Benny was, a quiver of excitement passed over him, as a faint grating sound, coming from behind the windows, reached his ears. The next moment the shutters had been drawn back, and the window noiselessly opened.

"Hist!"

"Right," breathed Benny, "I'm here," and more like a shadow than a man of flesh and blood, he glided through the open window into the pitch-dark room beyond.

"The old man's sleeping like a log," whispered the voice of Seaton Revelle from out the blackness, "I've got the key. Light up!"

Benny drew a tiny lantern from his pocket, and, having struck a match that emitted no noise, lit it. For a moment the light fell upon the figure of Revelle, dressed in a suit of silk pyjamas, a slight flush of colour on his usually pallid face.

"The safe's in the study on the ground floor. Follow me, and, for Heaven's sake, don't make a noise—there's a bedroom above!"

With cat-like, noiseless tread, Revelle led the way from the dining-room into the hall. Benny might have been his shadow. In the hall they paused for a moment to listen. The ghostly silence was only broken by the monotonous ticking of the clock.

"Leave the door open," whispered Revelle, as they glided into the study; "now lend a hand with the lantern."

A minute later, a yellow circle of light fell upon the massive safe that, half-buried in the wall, stood in one corner of the room.

Revelle had a bundle of keys in his hand; holding it in the light of the lantern, he selected one of a peculiar pattern.

"Thank goodness," he whispered, as he fitted it in the lock, "it's an ordinary not a combination lock."

He turned the key, and the great door swung back noiselessly on its well-oiled hinges.

"Keep that light steady, confound you! It's bobbing up and down like a will-o'-the-wisp!"

Benny steadied himself. He was as cool as most men, but in the moment of intense excitement he had suddenly discovered a strange tremor. He was a skilled and experienced cracksman, but there was something almost unnatural to him in the ease and simplicity with which it had all been done. The safe was open, and the lantern's full glare fell upon a broad belt with many buttoned pockets that lay upon one of the shelves. Seaton Revelle, alias the Marquis, was quite calm, as picking up the belt, he critically fingered it. The faint, crisp, crackling sound that came from it told of an inner lining of bank-notes. Two of the pockets bulged out with small nobby projections.

"Now, Benny, give me the lantern," whispered Revelle, "and slip this belt round your waist. The sooner you're off the premises now, the better——"

Crash!

Except where the lantern cast a small circle of light, the room was in utter darkness. As Benny had fastened the belt round his waist, his elbow had come in contact with a china vase on the mantelpiece, and had dashed it to the ground.

"You clumsy idiot," hissed Revelle; "keep still, don't move."

He had clutched him by the wrist. Mr. Seaton Revelle had his wits about him. If that crash had awakened anyone, he calculated that they would listen before leaving their beds; and if no further sound followed, would turn over and go to sleep again.

But the next moment a stifled oath escaped his lips.

Someone was moving across the floor of the room overhead.

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"Out with the light! Don't move, Benny," he breathed between his clenched teeth; "leave it to me."

Quick as thought, he drew himself up close to the half-opened door.

The footsteps were moving towards the study. Revelle clenched his fist with the action of a man about to strike.

The next instant Alec Scarsdale, fully dressed, carrying a candle in one hand and shading his eyes with the other, crossed the threshold.

He started back as his eyes fell upon the motionless figure of Benny, dimly lighted by the candle, standing beside the open safe. Then, before he could cry out or raise the alarm, there was the sickening sound of a blow. With a dull thud he rolled over on to the thick carpet, stunned and insensible, and still clutching the burning candle.

"Go, Benny, go," hoarsely whispered Revelle, as dashing to the safe, he snatched out the key with the bundle attached to it, and bending down beside the motionless form, jammed it into the hand that was free, "ride like the devil, I'm going to raise the alarm—it's my only chance."

Benny darted from the room. Revelle blew out the candle; then feeling in his breast pocket, he drew from it a half-filled white paper packet, and hurriedly placed it in the waistcoat pocket of the senseless man beside him.

The next moment the death-like silence that again prevailed was abruptly broken by a loud cry for help, so loud that it reached the ears of the cyclist who, more like a phantom than a man, was scorching at a mad pace down the dark road.

In an instant all was confusion within the house. Frightened men and women servants, some half-dressed, others carrying lights, rushed down the stairs into the hall.

"Help—thieves—help!"

As the cry rang out a second time, Esther Mansfield, her face white with terror, a light robe hurriedly thrown about her, descended the stairs. She followed the group of servants who, guided by the shouts, were crowding into the study. The lights fell upon the open safe; upon Seaton Revelle, who knelt beside and gripped a prostrate figure.

"Robbery!" he cried, "there were two of them—it was dark—one's escaped—but I've got the other. Quick, some one go for the police!"

Snatching a light from one of the shivering servants, he brought it close to the death-hued face of the man stretched on the floor.

"My God!" he cried, dashing a hand across his eyes. "It can't be! Yes! It—it's Alec Scarsdale!"

The next instant a shrill, piteous shriek—a girlish cry of anguish—rang out from behind the amazed and dumb-stricken servants, and Esther Mansfield fell to the ground in a death-like swoon.

A few minutes later the faint clatter of horse's hoofs rang out. One of the servants was riding off in hot haste to summon the police.

CHAPTER IV.

An Infamous lie.

WHEN Alec Scarsdale, opening his eyes, gazed wildly around him, he was lying on a couch in the study. His head was throbbing fiercely. For a few moments he was but dimly conscious of indistinct and unrecognisable figures hovering round him. It was only when the mist had cleared away from his eyes that the figures resolved themselves into Seaton Revelle, two constables, and John Mansfield, who, his face white with passion, his eyes heavily rimmed, was gazing sternly at him.

"What's happened?" gasped Scarsdale, clasping his burning, scarred forehead, "have—have the scoundrels escaped? I should recognise one of them again, but the other struck me down before—before I could see him."

The two policemen, who had hurried up from the village police-station, exchanged significant glances, John Mansfield had turned from a white to a livid colour.

For a moment there was a death-like silence, ominous as the unnatural calm before the outburst of the storm. Then it was broken by the banker's voice, hoarse and almost inarticulate with rage.

"You! You, whom I have believed in, trusted, —you, who only yesterday dared to tell me you loved my child—Ah, it's too much! I can't trust myself to speak!"

Scarsdale's eyes were staring wide. Did he hear aright, or had that blow affected his senses?

"What are you saying?" he breathed out hoarsely. "What do you mean?"

His eyes, still filled with a dazed look of incomprehension, wandered to the faces of the others, then lit up with a flash of horror. Was it possible that they suspected *him!*

"For God's sake, answer me!" He had staggered to his feet, and was glaring wildly at the circle of stern, set faces—"Answer me, someone! Don't all stand staring at me as if *I* had broken into the house, *I* had robbed the safe. Answer me, someone! Mr. Mansfield, Revelle, in God's name, what does this mean?"

The impassioned, desperate question was unanswered. Only a freezing silence!

With a gasp, Alec reeled back, the hideous truth staring him in the face. It was no nightmare, then! It was no dream from which he would awaken, but horrible reality.

One of the constables stepping forward—tapped him on the shoulder.

Scarsdale started as if stung by an asp. Then, maddened beyond control, scarcely conscious of what he did, he struck the constable a blow that sent him reeling backward.

"Hands off!" he shouted fiercely. "You're mad—all of you! It's a lie; an infamous lie!"

"A lie?" thundered John Mansfield. "Do you think I would allow you to be arrested if there was a shadow of doubt—you who were caught in the act, the open safe before you, the very key in your hand! Constables, do your duty."

The two policemen sprang upon him. This time, he did not resist, utterly stunned.

"Caught in the act," he muttered, like a man who talks in his sleep; "the safe open before me, the key in my hand!" He raised his fettered hands and covered his face. "Why, you are all mad. It was I who came down and caught the scoundrels in the act of robbing the safe!"

"Look here," said one of the policemen roughly, "you can tell all that to the magistrate." Then, turning to the banker—"You'll be good enough, sir, to come along to the station and prefer the charge, and the gentleman," glancing at Seaton Revelle, "who collared him, will come too."

Every word spoken seemed to add a fresh mesh to the net that was mercilessly being drawn around him.

"Revelle, they say you caught me in the act. Tell them it is a mistake—all a mistake!"

Seaton Revelle took a step towards him, and, without flinching, a hard light shining from out his dark eyes, stared him straight in the face.

"You scoundrel;" he said deliberately, "don't appeal to me. You know well enough what has happened!"

Scarsdale drew in a deep breath. His brain was working

like lightning now. Something—one of those indefinable instincts that sometimes come to us—told him that the man who stood before him, staring him calmly in the face, was the cause of all his present misery.

"You've lied!" he gasped, "you are lying now!"

Revelle shrugged his shoulders.

Scarsdale, cut to the quick, maddened beyond all control, swiftly raised his handcuffed hands above his head; but, before they could descend, the constables had flung themselves upon him.

"Here, none of that!" cried one of them.

The spasm of passion, that had momentarily convulsed and had over-mastered him, had passed away. He drew himself up to his full height.

"I tell you," he said, his grey eyes flashing fiercely, fastened on John Mansfield. "I tell you I'm innocent, completely innocent of this charge, I'm the victim of coincidence, or—or conspiracy!"

Every eye was fastened upon him. No one noticed the door open, nor the silent figure that, with face as white as marble, stood on the threshold. Scarsdale's back was half turned to the door.

"I tell you," he cried, as the hot, passionate blood again surged to his forehead, pointing an accusing finger at Seaton Revelle, "that that man has perjured himself. Oh, God!"—his voice broke and faltered—"am I alone? Does no one believe me innocent?"

"Yes—yes, I do! I—I believe you innocent!"

The words, piteous in their intensity, rang out with startling abruptness from the threshold. Every face was turned in the direction whence they had come.

There, white as death, her great, dark eyes dilated with a look of wild grief, her whole frame quivering, stood Esther. Then, before her father could prevent her, she sprang forward and flung her arms round Scarsdale's neck.

"Alec, Alec," she sobbed, "I know it can't be true, I know it can't be true!"

It was a dramatic scene. The graceful, sobbing girl clinging to the stalwart, well-knit, handcuffed figure; the helmeted police; Seaton Revelle, a shadow on his handsome face; John Mansfield, quivering and grey with passion.

"Esther," whispered Scarsdale, no longer conscious of the presence of the others, "thank God for this! I must go. Who knows, the truth of this night's work may yet come to light. Your love, your belief, will give me strength to fight the future. God bless you, my darling. Good-bye!"

He kissed her gently on the forehead. With a piteous cry she staggered from him, and, sinking down on the couch where he had lain, buried her face in her arms. He cast a long look at her quivering form. Then he steadied himself, and, turning to the constables, said: "I'm ready."

CHAPTER V.

At the Police-Station.

It was past four o'clock in the morning, and the grey light of dawn was already tingeing the sky when Scarsdale, handcuffed and firmly gripped on either side by the constables, was marched along the road to the police-station. The cool air beat upon his fevered brow, and seemed to enable him to collect his thoughts; but even now it seemed more like a fantastic dream than reality. Again he lived through all that had taken place from the moment he had left his room, roused by a faint, suspicious sound, arising from below, to when he had recovered consciousness to find himself overwhelmed by a hideous accusation. And the more he thought, the greater the darkness of his despair. How would it all end? If John Mansfield, who had known him so long, and had trusted him, believed him guilty, what would the outside world say? What would be the verdict of the judge and jury that he would have to face? He was a strong man, a brave man, but he shuddered at the thought. Even now, he did not know the damning strength of the evidence that would be brought against him.

But he was not without hope. He had seen the face of one of the men—the man on whom the light of the candle had fallen as he stood, motionless as a statue, beside the open safe. It had only been a momentary glimpse, but the features were deeply imprinted on his memory—a sharp, clean-shaven face, with upturned nose and small eyes. If only that man could be found!

Once within the police-station Scarsdale was unceremoniously pushed into a small, railed-off partition facing the sergeant, who sat at a desk, John Mansfield and Seaton Revelle standing beside him. The banker stated the charge; then Seaton Revelle, never faltering, never at a loss for a word, gave a concise account of all that had happened.

He stated how, aroused by a suspicious sound, he had crept downstairs, and had discovered two men in the act of robbing the safe. He had rushed upon them. The light had been extinguished before he could see their faces. He had closed with one of the men and had stunned him with a blow. The other had escaped. It was only when lights had been brought in, that he had recognised Scarsdale.

Scarsdale, convulsively gripping the rail in front of him, could scarcely believe his own ears. It was all a horrible tissue of lies from beginning to end! Yet how was he to disprove it? A wild desire seized him to break loose, to fling himself upon him, to wring the truth from his lying throat! But he mastered himself. He must not lose his self-control. Perhaps he might glean something, find some flaw that would prove the falsity of his evidence.

"I suppose," said the sergeant, addressing Seaton Revelle, "you didn't see the face, can give no description of the other man?"

"When I entered the room, his back was turned. I never saw his face. I only noticed that he was tall and thin."

Another lie! The man Scarsdale had seen was short.

"Now," said the sergeant, turning to Scarsdale, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

He told his story. There was a look of incredulity on the sergeant's face as he listened.

"Will you explain," he said, when Scarsdale had finished, "how you came to be fully dressed at past two o'clock in the morning?"

"I was restless, not inclined for bed. I was reading when I heard the first sounds."

"Can you offer any explanation of the fact that the key of the safe was found in your hand?"

"Only that the man who stunned me"—Scarsdale fastened his eyes on Seaton Revelle—"placed it there!"

The sergeant asked no more questions, but ordered the prisoner to be taken to a cell and carefully searched. They hurried him out of sight none too gently.

The sergeant turned to Mr. Mansfield.

"Your keys, sir, were with you when you went to bed?"

"Yes. I invariably place them under my pillow at night!"

"Are you a heavy sleeper?"

"Not as a rule; but——" the banker gave a start, as if a sudden thought had occurred to him—"Revelle, do you remember me remarking that my whisky had a peculiar taste?"

"Yes."

"And Scarsdale mixed it for me. That accounts for my heavy sleep, my racking headache. My drink must have been drugged!"

A policeman was returning from the passage leading to the

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cells. He was carrying a knife, some loose coin, a cigar-case, and a small, white paper packet.

"We've searched the prisoner," he said, "and this is all we found upon him."

Taking the packet from him, the Sergeant poured out a small portion of its contents—a white powder—into the palm of his hand, smelt it, and then placed a few grains on the tip of his tongue.

"We'll have this powder analysed, Mr. Mansfield," he said, "it looks very much as if you had been drugged."

When John Mansfield left the station, Seaton Revelle was supporting him.

"Esther!" half sobbed the old man, "my poor, poor child!"

Alec Scarsdale was alone in his cell, pacing to and fro with a feverish, monotonous stride. His thoughts were almost unbearable. He threw himself down on the plank bed, and closed his eyes, but he could get no relief, only seeming to realise more acutely. Again and again, thinking of Esther, as he had seen her moaning on that couch, he murmured her name. She alone believed in him—the one gleam of light in all that hideous darkness. What if she should lose her belief? When she had heard the damning evidence in all its fulness, would she still stand firm?

Then another feeling—a feeling of fierce hate—came over him. He clenched his teeth when he thought of the smooth, lying scoundrel who brought it all about. Yes, Seaton Revelle *must* have been one of the two men who had robbed the safe; he had no proof, and yet instinct told him it must be so. If only that other man could be caught and brought to justice!

When the constable entered the cell, Scarsdale feverishly turned upon him.

"Any news of the other man?" he asked anxiously, "any news?"

"Not yet," was the gruff answer, "but if you think your mate's going to get clear with the spoil, and put your share on one side till you've done your little bit of time, and come out, you're mistaken. We shall nab him, right enough!"

And having given a quick glance round, the policeman left the cell, and slammed to the door.

CHAPTER VI.

How a Stranger Aroused the Suspicions of the Landlord of the "Crown and Cushion," and whom he Proved to be!

THE "Crown and Cushion," the inn at which Benjamin Beard had made a brief stay, was an old-fashioned hostelry. The morning following Scarsdale's arrest saw tap-room, bar, and bar-parlour, crowded. There was only one topic of conversation—the sensational robbery at "Woodlands," the name of John Mansfield's residence. The excitement was intense, and the consumption of liquor great. Most of the facts were known. A servant from "Woodlands" had visited the inn, and had been the centre of interest. "Guilty" was the almost unanimous verdict brought against Scarsdale by those gathered there. But what of the unknown accomplice? An arrest had already been made, but the individual proved a conclusive *alibi*, and had been released.

Conversation was in full swing round the bar, when a bicyclist rode up leisurely, and dismounted outside the inn.

He was a little man of homely aspect, with a kindly face, and a pair of small, cheery eyes. Though his hair was quite grey and he was well past the meridian of life, there was a certain youthfulness about his bearing. A knapsack was slung on his back. Removing his cap to wipe his forehead the little man revealed a bald spot on his head, not unlike a priest's tonsure.

"A most enjoyable spin," he said to himself, "most. I think I am entitled to a half-pint of shandy-gaff!"

Excited, loud voices reached him from the inn.

"There seems to be a very animated discussion going on," he said to himself as he entered.

"Good morning to you!" he said amiably to the landlord, and ordered his shandy-gaff.

John Goodman, the landlord, was at that moment thinking of the unknown, mysterious accomplice so badly wanted by the police. He eyed the little man rather suspiciously.

"Come far, sir?" said Goodman, eyeing the knapsack now, and thinking of bank notes and diamonds.

"No," answered the little man, "done about twenty miles, not more; but it has been glorious riding. Lovely country!"

The crime of the previous night was being discussed on every side. The little man's homely face began to assume a look of mild interest.

"A burglary in this neighbourhood?" he asked of the landlord.

"Do you mean to say you've not heard of the robbery up at the 'Woodlands,' and the arrest of Mr. Scarsdale?"

"No, indeed!"

The landlord, eyeing him suspiciously, gave a brief account of the crime.

The little man's look of interest deepened.

"H'm!" he ejaculated, half to himself, "H'm!"—then addressing the landlord—"Yes, from what you've told me the evidence certainly does seem dead against Scarsdale; but I must say that I don't quite see his motive. He was, you tell me, supposed to be engaged to Miss Mansfield. He was in a good and confidential position. You would have thought, too, if he had wanted money—presuming that he did—that being in a bank and in a confidential position, he would have adopted a less crude and less risky method than burglary. In any case, it is very painful, very sad."

The little man was thinking now of Miss Mansfield.

"Yes," said the landlord, "it's sad; but it's as clear as a pike-staff! You're a stranger to these parts, then?"

"Yes. Quite. I'm just making a little tour, taking it very gently. My scorching days are over!"

The landlord stepped out of the bar and disappeared.

The little man's eyes twinkled merrily, as though his sense of humour had been tickled.

A few moments later, an ostler hurried away from the back of the inn towards the police-station. Presently he returned, accompanied by two policemen.

The landlord, a look of suppressed excitement on his face, had returned to the bar.

There was a sudden hush as the two constables entered quickly.

The only person who seemed unconcerned was the little man. His face was buried in a pewter mug. His eyes were twinkling like stars.

The landlord winked at the constables and indicated the little man with a jerk of his thumb.

One of the constables, a strapping young fellow, with an open, ingenuous countenance, tapped the little man on the shoulder. He put down the pewter and turned. The homely face lit up all over with a look of unexpected delight.

"Freddie!" he cried. "Well I never! So they've drafted you down here!"

"Uncle!" cried the young constable; then laughed loudly.

He turned round to the landlord, who was looking rather sheepish.

"Goodman," he said, "you've made a mistake this time. Do you know who this suspicious person is?"

"No!" stammered the landlord.

"Mr. Crump, late chief inspector of Scotland Yard!"

[Another instalment of this splendid story will appear in next Tuesday's "Short Stories." The incidents depicted in the sketches which appeared in the little leaflet, and which are appearing on the covers of "Short Stories," will be dealt with shortly.]

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A Cross Road Courtship.

A Pretty Tale Illustrating that "All is not Gold that Glitters."

With scarce a sound, a large 24 h.p. tonneau sped along the deserted highway at something over the legal limit. Its sole occupant, a young man, leather capped and jacketed, who leant over the wheel, seemed intent only upon outstripping the ever-lengthening cloud of white dust that marked his passage. Totally oblivious of the beautiful country he was passing, his attention was occupied solely with the narrow strip of road he was traversing.

Up hill and down hill at the same even pace sped the car, till from the summit of a rise, a sign post, with extended arm, appeared in the valley below, some fifty yards ahead. In the wooded valley, hidden from view, lay the cross road. A jarring, discordant hoot warned wayfarers, if such there were, of the approaching car.

Mingling with the sound of the motor-horn came another sound; the cry of a frightened girl. An instant later a bicycle wobbled across the path of the approaching car, cleared it with an inch to spare, and deposited its terror-stricken rider safely in the ditch.

To disengage the clutch, clap on the brake, and bring the car to a sudden stand, that nearly jerked the driver from his seat, was but the work of a second. The next he was lifting the huddled, sobbing heap of distressed beauty from the ditch.

"I do hope that you are not hurt!" he exclaimed, as he deposited his trembling burden on a bank by the roadside. "I shall never forgive myself for having been the cause of your accident."

"Oh, no, I am not hurt one little bit!" was the reassuring reply, as she still clung to the supporting arm. "And it wasn't your fault. I was frightened, and that wretched bicycle wouldn't stop to let me get off."

Never had the motor-man looked on anything so fair as the mud-stained, bedraggled girl who sat beside him, hatless, a wealth of golden hair falling about her shoulders, and smiling through her tears. Speech forsook him, and so to relieve the constraint which grew upon him, as he gazed at his victim, he busied himself removing the outward sign of disaster from coat and skirt, with a square yard of spotless cambric.

The process finished, all too soon, and not without some pretty protest, the motor-man bethought him reluctantly of the urgent necessity of conveying his victim to her home, and that with all dispatch.

"Where do you live, Miss——?" he asked somewhat awkwardly.

"Clare Summerfield," was the smiling reply to the half asked question. "Mother and I are stopping at the Rosary, near Four Cross, about two miles from here."

Clare's answer also implied a question, but this the unknown motorist appeared not to understand. Without revealing his identity he continued—

"I must drive you home; we can find room for the bicycle inside the car."

"Oh, my hair!" cried Clare, noticing its state of freedom for the first time, "and where's my hat?"

The young man groped in the ditch, whilst with a few deft turns the girl adroitly restored her fallen tresses to their more conventional state.

"You can't possibly wear this," said the young man, holding up the recovered straw, from the interior of which trickled a steady stream of liquid mud. For a moment he held his own leather cap in his hand as if about to offer it, then seized with a sudden idea, dived into some mysterious recess in the body of the motor-car, and returned with a cloth cap.

"This at least is dry," he remarked as he handed it to Clare.

Whilst the girl adjusted the cap he stripped off his leather jacket and held it out invitingly. Shivering with cold, and only partially recovered from the recent shock, Clare passed her arms half way through the long sleeves, and submitted silently to the buttoning up process; rendered lengthy by reason of the trembling fingers which performed it.

Her toilet complete, a pair of strong arms lifted the girl on to the box seat of the car, a rug was wrapped about her knees, and her bicycle placed inside. The unknown motorist mounted and the homeward journey commenced.

An unaccountable silence had fallen on the pair, and by the time the Rosary was in sight, scarcely a word had been exchanged.

But ere the cottage gate was fairly reached the silence was broken.

"Clare, my darling, what have you been doing?" cried an anxious voice. "What a figure to come home!"

Rightly judging the owner of the voice to be the mother of his victim, the young man explained the situation. And with such respectful bearing and genuine concern did he tell the story of the morning's adventure, that he won the heart of the mother as completely as the daughter had won his.

"Depend upon it, Clare, he's a somebody," Mrs. Summerfield remarked, the moment car and driver were out of hearing. "Only wealthy people drive motor-cars. Did you notice the crest, dear? And such a manner, too. Now I wonder who he is?"

The cloth cap which still rested upon Clare's golden tresses suggested a possible clue, and to this her mother turned her attention. A critical search revealed the letter L., interwoven with the lining.

"There!" cried the lady triumphantly. "That is something. Now we must find out all about the young men in these parts who have L. for an initial."

That afternoon whilst Clare rested, her mother studied a well worn "Debrett," and not without startling and gratifying results.

"My dear," said the elder lady in an awed whisper, when her daughter descended for tea, "I've found out all about him. He's the Earl of Langfield! Listen!" She read with suppressed excitement from a turned down page, "Langfield, Richard George D'Eastcourt, eleventh earl. Langfield,

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Berkshire; How Fell, Yorkshire; Rigg, County Down, Ireland, and 145, Grosvenor Square, London."

"But how do you know he is an earl?" asked Clare. "Many men have L. for an initial, and they can't all be earls."

"I'm certain of it," was the confident reply. "Langfield is only five miles from here, and one of the show places of the county, I found that out in the local guide. Then there's the crest. Do you remember that, Clare? Well, here's a picture of it."

Clare read the half column of "Debrett" carefully, studied the coat of arms minutely, and admitted that the identity of the unknown motor-man was established beyond a doubt.

"Only twenty-four years old, owns 11,000 acres in Berkshire, two other country places, and a house in Grosvenor Square. One of our few unmarried peers. Clare, think of that!"

For the first time since circumstances had compelled the mother and daughter to vacate a small West Kensington flat, in favour of Coronation guests, and seek refuge in the furnished Berkshire cottage, the good lady recognised the guiding hand of Providence.

Whilst still discussing the morning's adventure, and all that it might lead to, the sound of a motor-horn warned the two ladies that the subject of their eager speculation was at hand.

Up the rose-lined gravel path strode the driver of the car, a huge bouquet of hot-house flowers in his hand, and a look of anxious expectation on his face.

"I felt so concerned about Miss Summerfield that I really could not keep away," he commenced, depositing the floral tribute on the table beside him

"Really, Lord Langfield, this is most thoughtful of you," replied the proud mother, eager to apprise his lordship at the earliest opportunity that his identity was no longer a secret.

The young man looked surprised, almost startled in fact, at the sound of his name.

"Clare is better," the lady continued; then, after a pause, "but unfortunately she is likely to be in the house for some days, her ankle is sprained."

"Oh! mother," Clare began, not having heard of the sprained ankle till that moment.

"But she will not admit it," interrupted the diplomatic mother. "Clare is a regular little Spartan."

Greedily the youth swallowed the bait. Placed himself and his motor-car at the entire disposal of the ladies, and begged to be allowed to take them for a drive on the morrow. A favour which was granted after some show of reluctance.

"Did you ever see such a modest young man?" asked the elder lady when for the second time that day the motor-car had left the gate. "Why, he positively blushed when I gave him his proper title!"

That night the good lady penned half-a-dozen letters to as many intimate friends in town, enlarging on the joys of their country life, the agreeable society which had opened its arms to them, and hinting, in an exasperatingly mysterious manner, that some highly interesting news might shortly be expected concerning dear Clare.

During the next few days a motor-car emblazoned with the Langfield coat-of-arms, carrying a young man and a girl on the box, and an elderly and somewhat nervous lady in the tonneau, might have been seen in many parts of Berkshire.

As time went on the occupants of the car were reduced to two in number, the girl who was learning to drive it, and the young man who guided her hand.

These two preferred the quiet country lanes and a slow sedate pace, to high roads and racing speed. Often might they have been seen despoiling a richly laden hedge of its wealth of wild roses and honeysuckle, whilst the motor stood unheeded and immovable. But most favoured of all spots was the bank by the sign post which marked the cross-road where they had first met.

When not driving Clare about the country, the youth was a constant visitor at the cottage. Concerning himself he never spoke, and this, the ambitious mother attributed to becoming modesty. Then he lingered in the country when all the world was in town, and saw nothing of society save that of the two ladies, which were circumstances of too fortunate a nature to call for comment.

So the weeks sped, the mother patient and tactful, Clare expectant, and the undeclared lover forging fresh links to his fetters day by day.

One afternoon Clare arrived home with a tell tale blush upon her dimpled cheeks. Contrary to his usual habit the youth refused to enter the cottage, and departed with an undignified display of haste.

"Clare, tell me quick!" cried her mother. "You don't mean to say you have been so mad as to refuse him?"

Clare hastened to reassure her mother, and tell her, as much as she thought fit, of the interview at the cross-road.

"He really is an awkward boy at times," the lady remarked, with a sigh of relief. "To think of his rushing off like that, you can't tell what a shock he gave me. Then to think of his never asking me first. I can't understand why he hasn't been snapped up before. I'm sure any designing woman could twist him round her finger."

"Clare, my dear," continued the mother after a thoughtful pause, "do you know I think it might be a wise thing to send you away for a time, if only to give him an opportunity of writing to you. Yes, I will write to your aunt Julia to-night."

But the letter to aunt Julia was never written.

That evening, for the first time since his acquaintance with the ladies at the Rosary, the accepted lover failed to put in an appearance. Nor was the familiar sound of the motor-horn heard at the cottage door next day.

"My dear, this is most trying," the elder lady remarked as the afternoon of the long day spent in anxious speculation drew to a close. "I can't call upon him, we have never been to Langfield, and it would be just as undignified to write. before he has called and asked my sanction. Even if he has met with an accident he should have sent a message."

Clare was silent.

"Suppose we go and call on the vicar's wife," her mother suggested. "I owe her a call, and if anything has happened she may have heard of it."

Anything to relieve the growing tension was acceptable, and, with but brief regard to toilet, the two anxious women were soon walking rapidly towards the village.

The village was in a flutter of excitement. On the green stood a large marquee, wherein was being held the annual flower-show.

And at the door of the tent, surrounded by a crowd of idlers, stood the well-known motor-car!

As mother and daughter paused irresolute, a fair young man came out of the tent, sprang into the car and seized the wheel. From behind the car hurried its accustomed driver, who touched his cap respectfully to the man on the box, and sat down at his feet, half in and half out of the car.

The idlers cheered, the man at the wheel raised his hat, and the car dashed off in the direction of Langfield.

"Can you tell me the name of the gentleman driving that motor-car?" the elder lady asked in a choking voice of a constable who stood close by.

"Yes, mum, that's the Earl of Langfield; he came home quite sudden last night. Been away a year," was the reply.

"And the other man?"

"That's Tom Bowers, the postman's son. His lordship's driver, and a clever young chap too."

"You are quite sure it was the earl who was driving?"

"Bless you, yes, lady, there's no mistaking him!"

So full of conviction was the tone of the constable that not a vestige of doubt remained in the mind of either of his hearers.

All through the night two distracted women packed, and not till the troubled waters of the Channel rolled between them and the scene of their discomfiture did they rest

A. Clarke Little.

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FROM 3 P.M. TO 3 A.M.

The Story of a Burglary.

PROLOGUE.

"I PRESUME you take the usual precautions to insure the safety of these valuables?"

"Precautions? Not I! I believe the man who takes the least precaution enjoys the greatest immunity from midnight marauders, while he who secures his valuables behind bolts and bars, locks and double locks, excites, by these very precautions, the cupidity of the housebreaker. I have been a householder for upwards of five-and-twenty years; have as fine a collection of plate as any in St. John's Wood, leave my money about in all sorts of queer places, and have never yet been honoured by a visit from one of these gentlemen."

The man who thus boasted of the valuable nature of his possessions and the insecurity of his front door was Matthew Daunton—senior partner in the well-known firm of Daunton and Davies, tea-brokers, of Mincing Lane. He was not—as one might very naturally have supposed from the foregoing speech—either a windbag or an idiot, but was considered, by all who knew him, a sharp practical man of business. He had, it is true, delivered himself thus in the publicity of a compartment on the Central London Railway. But the speech was addressed to his trusty partner, Mr. Wilfred Davies, and he had first assured himself that no one else was within earshot—at least, no one likely to be interested in the matter. A girl was sitting not far off, with pale face and bent head, her thin hands clasped together in her lap, but she appeared to pay but little heed to the conversation.

"By the way," said Davies, after a brief pause, "I suppose you know nothing of the whereabouts of your son, Gerald?"

The girl started visibly, and the thin hands clutched convulsively in her lap. Fortunately the involuntary movement was not observed, and she stealthily turned her large blue eyes toward the man addressed. He was a tall, severe-looking figure, with iron-grey hair and sharply-defined features. The look of habitual severity on his face deepened at the question.

"No," he replied curtly. "Nor do I wish to know anything of the scapegrace. I have buried that story these four years, Davies, and have no wish to hear it revived."

An indignant flush overspread the girl's face, and a look, half-angry, half-sorrowful, came into her eyes.

"Humph!" ejaculated Davies. "That is our one point of disagreement, Daunton. I said you were in the wrong at the time, and I'll stick to it to the last."

A soft, shy glance of gratitude shot from the girl's eyes, but the stern-faced old man made no reply.

"Heigho!" continued Davies with a sigh, half-humorous, half-pathetic, "what a topsy-turvy world this is, to be sure! Here am I who would have given a cool ten thousand pounds for a son like yours, and never grudged a penny of it—and I am father of none. And you—who have one—value the possession so lightly that you cast him out into the streets without a shilling in his pocket!"

Still the old man made no reply, but sat, with set face, staring straight before him. The girl sighed and turned away her head. Presently the men began to talk again, but this time it was of matters wholly connected with their business. At the next station the girl alighted, and, ascending to the busy thoroughfare above, a little after three o'clock on a wintry afternoon, was soon swallowed up in the seething multitude of the great Metropolis.

CHAPTER I.

"He Shall Not Die!"

THE short, cheerless afternoon had deepened into night, and a thick mantle of damp fog hung like a pall over the great city, when a woman turned into a narrow street in the vicinity of Marylebone, and, entering one of the dingy tenements it contained, ascended the dark, narrow staircase to an upper floor. She pushed open the door of a back room and entered. There was no light, save that of the fire burning in the grate. As she entered a man rose from a low stool by the fire, and went towards her.

"You must be tired, dear," he said, helping her off with her cloak and placing a chair for her by the fire.

"I think I am just a little tired," she said with a smile. "But that is only a trifle. A cup of tea will soon put me right again. Oh, how nice it is to be home!" And she laid her pale cheek against her husband's shoulder, and rested there for a few moments in silence.

"Home!" he said bitterly. But she laid her hand gently on his lips, and he was silent.

"Poor old boy!" she said, after a brief pause. "You have had another disappointing day, haven't you?"

"Yes," he said, in a dry, hard voice. "It is nothing else than disappointment—cruel, bitter, heart-breaking disappointment! How is it all to end?"

"Hush, dear!" said the woman, smoothing his short, crisp, curly hair with her thin hand. "We must be patient and brave. Perhaps the end is nearer than we expect. I often think how we shall laugh at these dark days of anxiety and dread when they shall be nothing more than a memory of the unhappy past. And yet we shall not always laugh either, for we shall ever bear them a tender thought, since they have knit us closer together in the bond of love than ever could have been accomplished under the smile of prosperity."

"Brave little woman!" said the man, drawing her towards him and kissing her tenderly. "You never complain, though God knows you have reason enough to do so!"

Presently the woman turned.

"Where is Eric?" she asked.

"He is asleep on the couch," the man replied in a low voice. "Poor little chap! He seems very poorly to-night."

The woman went quickly over to one corner of the dark room, and, kneeling down on the bare floor, listened to the low, fitful breathing of a child—a pretty, pale-faced, blue-eyed,

flaxen-haired boy of three. Then she rose and returned to her husband.

"If he should grow worse," she said decisively, "we must call in a doctor."

"But the fee!" exclaimed the man anxiously.

"We must get the money somewhere," responded the woman earnestly. "It must—it shall be procured by some means or other!" And the colour sprang into her pale cheeks and her blue eyes blazed with the fire of determined resolve.

The man sighed and turned towards the fire.

"Sit down, dear," he said, gently forcing her into the chair he had placed for her, "and tell me all your news. I suppose you have met with no success?"

"No immediate success," she answered. "But the editors were very kind indeed, and one has promised to read my two stories and communicate with me in a few days as to the result. Let us hope his verdict will bring us what we so much need."

"Did the Oxford Street firm pay you for your sewing?" inquired the man.

"Yes. I went there first. It was so piercingly cold that I disdained the time-honoured but draughty 'bus for the warmth and ease of the 'Twopenny Tube.'" She paused for an instant, and then continued gravely: "There were two gentlemen with me in the carriage, and I overheard their conversation."

The man looked up inquiringly from his seat on the low stool by his wife's side.

"One was your father, dear," she went on, "and the other was his partner."

The young man rose to his feet with an exclamation of surprise.

"You saw him?" he asked.

"Yes, dear. They spoke of you. Mr. Davies told your father boldly that he had done you an injustice—that he had always affirmed it, and that he would always affirm it."

"And my father—what said he?"

"Dear Gerald," said the girl, laying her hand soothingly on his arm, "the day of your father's forgiveness has not yet come. He is still unrelenting. But rest assured, dear Gerald, that one day you will both be reconciled—perhaps before very long. He looks very old and grey—altogether different from what you have pictured him to me as he was four years ago It seems cruel to treat you—his son—his only son—with so much harshness. And he boasted"—she added bitterly—"of his plate and his possessions, and the careless way in which he left his money about the house, with no more security than he would keep his coals."

The man started, and looked into the face of his wife. But he spoke no word, and the girl continued:

"It is hard for you, Gerald dear, but we must bear it bravely and wait for the time that is coming—that must come before long."

Thus, with gentle tones and hopeful words, she soothed the rising rebellion in her husband's breast against the father who had disowned him—words which were not altogether the utterance of her own heart, as the occasional flash of indignant anger which gleamed in her blue eyes gave ample testimony. But she conquered her own feelings—as she so often did—for his sake, and soothed him, when she herself as sorely needed the same gracious influence in her own breast.

Presently the man rose.

"I am restless," he said. "I shall run out for an hour and walk it off."

"All right," responded the girl, wisely judging it best for him that he should do so.

Gerald took up his hat and walked towards the door. He hesitated half-way, and came back quickly to his wife's side. She rose to meet him, and he took her in his arms—folding her fiercely to his breast.

"Would to God I could get something to do!" he groaned, "for your sake and—for Eric's!"

Kissing her passionately, he released her, and she heard his footfall down the long flight of stairs till he passed out into the street below.

"For my sake and—for Eric's!" she repeated. "For Eric's!"

She bent again over the sleeping child and listened. He turned uneasily in his sleep, and muttered a childish phrase. The mother lit a candle which stood on the mantelpiece, and held it above the childish form. The cheeks—until now so pale and white—were flushed with fever. The forehead was damp, and the little transparent hands moved restlessly upon the coverlet. A dreadful fear came into the mother's heart as she watched him, and she caught her breath involuntarily, while her wide eyes dilated with a new-born terror. Then she went back to her seat by the fire and tried to think. All the misery of the bitter joyless past rose up before her—Gerald's youthful extravagances—his father's anger—and then—when that had only partially subsided—the revelation that his son, for whom he had been so ambitious, had engaged himself to a penniless unknown girl. She remembered the scene that had followed, the choice of two courses offered to the son by a relentless father—the indignant refusal to obey his father's wishes—and the angry dismissal from his father's house, never to return.

And Gerald had married her. All through those four long years of patient struggle with the world, they had comforted and helped each other in the daily battle for bread—and they had not complained. But darker days than they had hitherto known had come upon them. Gerald could obtain no employment, and their scanty resources had now come to an end. But all this was as nothing compared with that other and more terrible dread which now oppressed her heart. Eric—her own Eric! She could not bear to lose him—her son—her firstborn! The thought maddened her. No—she could not—she would not lose her little Eric!

"He shall not die! He shall not die!" she said in a low, fierce whisper.

Yet what could she do? He needed a doctor, it was clear. Yet she could not pay his fee. Her darling stood in need of nice things—all those dainty delicacies which tempt the appetite and help so materially to strengthen the invalid. But she was powerless to obtain them for him. And then the thought of who it was that had wrought this terrible poverty and distress came upon her with tenfold force, and the angry blood tinged her pale face anew. She saw again that stern, set face and heard the cruel words of the old man, and her heart hardened towards him as it had never done before.

"And he boasted of his possessions, and the insecurity with which he kept them!" she said bitterly. "His curiosities and his plate—his very money—lying about for anyone who cared to carry it off! And we—his son—his son's son—are here—so near—and yet—starving—perhaps—perhaps dying!"

She sat staring into the fading firelight till Gerald returned. They spoke but little, for their hearts were heavy and their thoughts were too busy for speech. It had but just struck the hour of ten when they laid their heads upon their scanty pillows, to seek the rest and repose which they so much needed. And one of the two, at least, was soon asleep—forgetful, for a little space, of the disappointments and hardships—the suffering and sorrow—of the day that had passed and that which was to come.

CHAPTER II.
The Burglar.

IT was six o'clock that same evening when the senior partner in the firm of Daunton and Davies let himself in at the front door of his elegant house in St. John's Wood. He was not in the best of humours, and vented his irritation by complaining of his dinner and reprimanding his domestics. Dinner over, he went, as was his custom, to the library and seated himself before the fire—a lonely old man—with no companionship save that of his own reflections. He felt

miserable and dejected, though he could not tell why. There were no bright faces to welcome him; no words of love or happy laughter to greet him on his return, it is true. But he was surrounded by every conceivable aid to his comfort and ease, could command every luxury he desired, and, in all other respects, was looked upon as an enviable man. But, to-night, the bright glancing fire that glowed in the grate failed to warm his heart with its ruddy influence—the generous wine he had imbibed at dinner had proved altogether powerless to dissipate his fit of despondency, and his pipe—man's universal baby-bottle — had as signally failed to restore his mental tranquillity.

He tried to lead his thoughts into pleasanter channels, but, despite all his efforts, the memory of the past — that miserable haunting past — rose up accusingly before him. Yet had he been less than just? Was not punishment the righteous sequel to wilfulness and disobedience? Duty was a stern monitor, but he had faithfully fulfilled its obligations, and had punished the guilty offender—though that offender had been his own son—justly, and without mercy.

Without mercy! The words repeated themselves in his ear, and struck him with a new significance. Without mercy! What did the term convey? Without mercy meant merciless.

Merciless! A thought struck him, and he went over to a bookcase and took down a volume of an encyclopædic dictionary. Turning over the pages he found the word "merciless." Yes, there it was, and he read it aloud:

"Merciless — unfeeling, hard-hearted, pitiless, cruel, unmerciful, savage."

He closed the book with a snap, and shut out the ugly words from his sight. But he could not blot out the remembrance of what he had read.

"Pitiless—cruel—savage!" he muttered. "A pitiless, cruel, savage father!"

His lined, care-worn face grew white under the iron-grey hair, and a startled look came into his eyes.

"My God!" he said hoarsely, "can it be true?"

He sank his head upon his hands and groaned aloud.

"After all these years," he muttered brokenly. "Gerald—is it true? Have I thus earned—by my rigid enforcement of your long punishment—and mine—yes, mine—ten thousand times mine—those terrible titles to the holy name of father? Oh, it cannot be—it cannot be!"

But conscience did not console him. And memory? Did memory refute the awful charge? Alas, no! A sweet, appealing face—the face of his long-dead wife—rose up before him out of the mist of the past, and the accusing voice grew louder and more importunate within him.

It was eleven o'clock when he retired to his own room—tossed on a stormy sea of doubt and uncertainty, sorrow and remorse—and lay, with wide-open eyes and aching head, staring into the darkness before him. After an hour he fell asleep, and dream of the happy, bygone days, when his young wife stood by his side and his wilful Gerald was a merry boy of three.

He was awakened by the sound of a footfall on the lower floor. Knowing that it must be very late, and being curious to discover who could be about at that hour, he got out of bed, attired himself in dressing-gown and slippers, and proceeded cautiously down the wide staircase. When he reached the hall, he stood still and listened. For a few moments no sound broke the stillness which pervaded the dark house. And then—faintly, yet unmistakably—he heard a soft footfall in the library.

Stealthily he approached the door, and, turning the handle noiselessly, entered the room and closed the door behind him. The electric light had been switched on and revealed the figure of a man standing at his writing-table, the drawers of which were open. The man uttered a startled exclamation as he beheld the figure of Matthew Daunton standing, with his back to the door, confronting him. He was somewhat short of stature, slim and handsome. He was attired in a long dark overcoat, which buttoned all the way down to his feet, and a glossy silk hat covered his head. His features were refined and his hands white and shapely. The man's appearance altogether—his dress, his bearing, the pale, handsome face and clear blue eyes—belied his apparent calling.

For some moments the two men confronted each other without speaking. Daunton was the first to break the silence, and he spoke with perfect self-composure.

"It is scarcely necessary to inquire the object of this intrusion," he said coldly.

There was not a trace of cowardice in the man's manner as he met the eyes of the old man before him. But his face was very white, and the thin fingers closed involuntarily over the back of a chair against which he stood.

"I came," he said, "with the intention of relieving you of a few of those valuables which you prize so lightly and of whose insecurity you so openly boast."

The old man started.

"And who, may I inquire, has favoured you with the latter of item of intelligence?"

"That is neither here nor there," replied the man. "I have explained my purpose in entering your house, and that is all that would interest you."

Daunton looked steadily at the man and hesitated.

"Pardon me," he said, with mock politeness, "but perhaps you would not object to satisfy me upon one other point. Your appearance is scarcely consistent with your vocation. Am I right in supposing that this is your maiden effort in the art of housebreaking?"

The young man's face flushed.

"Since you are so good as to inquire," he said, "I may as well confess that your conjecture is perfectly true."

The words were bold, but his voice faltered and the hand which held the chair trembled visibly.

"You are nervous and unstrung," said Daunton, relenting a little. "Will you oblige me by sitting down in that chair?"

The man obeyed without a word, and Daunton eyed him with increasing interest. Four-and-twenty hours before he would have given the man into custody without a second thought, but his self-abasement of the last few hours had not been without its effect. The thought rose up in his mind, even as he stood there, facing the man who had come to rob him—"What if Gerald had come to this—and through his own pitiless unforgiving anger!"

"Tell me," he said, in an altered voice, "how came you to do this thing?"

The man looked with bewildered surprise into the face before him.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, "but I don't quite understand you?"

"I want you to tell me," replied Daunton gently, "what it was that induced—perhaps"—and he eyed the white face narrowly—"perhaps I should say—what *drove* you to undertake this criminal task to-night?"

The man's eyes flashed and his breast heaved, as he replied:

"What drove me? The greatest forces in life—love, hunger, and the fear of death! Is not that enough? To see our dear ones grow haggard and grey in the grip of poverty and despair; to watch our little ones being slowly but relentlessly snatched from us by the cruel monsters of disease and death—are not these enough to drive even the timid to deeds of crime and shame?"

The old man's face grew very grave, and the image of his absent boy rose up again before his eyes.

"Poor fellow! Poor fellow!" he muttered under his breath.

The young man looked at him in amazement.

"The name of Matthew Daunton is not usually associated with the sentiment of compassion," he said bitterly.

Daunton coloured and regarded the man in some surprise.

"I know not who you are, nor how much, nor how little, you know of me," he said. "But I feel deeply and truly sorry for your position—of that you may be assured; and; to prove the truth of this assertion, I give you my word of honour that I will take no proceedings against you for your unlawful entry into my house this night. And if you will oblige me by accepting a small temporary loan"—and he took a crisp £10 Bank of England note from a private drawer in his writing-table—"I shall be happy to advance it without any formality in the matter of security."

The man started to his feet in mute astonishment. The blood rushed to his white face, and receded as quickly as it had come, while he swayed to and fro as if about to fall. Then, with a low, inarticulate cry, he fell back into the chair and covered his face with his hands. As he did so, his hat—which had hitherto covered his head—fell to the floor, and a long, bright coil of wavy golden hair fell over the rounded shoulders and gleamed in the light of the electric lamps.

Matthew Daunton uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Good God!" he exclaimed; "it is a woman!"

He looked helplessly at her for some moments till he had recovered from his astonishment, and then, stepping up to her, he laid a trembling hand upon her shoulder and said brokenly:

"My dear child, I thank God it was to this house you came to-night! What your fate would have been had you gone elsewhere, I tremble to think. But you must promise me here, before you go, that you will never do this thing again. Come to me if you are ever in need, and I will help you; but never, I implore you, run this fearful risk again!" and he pressed the bank-note into her hand.

At the touch of the money the girl rose to her feet, pale and trembling, and stood, with downcast eyes, facing the agitated old man.

"Wait!" she whispered. "I have not yet told you all. My name is your name, for I am Gerald's wife!"

The lined face grew ashy pale as the old man listened to the revelation. His knees shook beneath him, and the girl looked anxiously into his face. With a great effort he controlled himself, and then—with a broken "Thank God!"—he held out his arms and clasped the shrinking girl to his heart. And, in that one brief moment of time, the bitter memory and sorrow of the past were blotted out for ever.

Half an hour later Gerald was awakened from a deep sleep by a vigorous hammering upon the panels of his door, and, rising to inquire into the cause of this unusual disturbance, noticed with astonishment the absence of his wife, and was next rendered speechless with amazement by the following extraordinary epistle:

"16 Landau Gardens, St. John's Wood.

"My Dear Boy,—I am waiting to see you. Wrap the little boy up warmly and bring him with you. Your wife is here already. You will probably discover that your hat and coat are missing, and, as things seem all upside down, it will not be inconsistent if you wear those belonging to your wife. Your remorseful old father,

"Matthew Daunton."

It was three in the morning when Gerald—after an absence of four years—once more entered his father's house, bearing in his arms the child he loved so dearly. The scene that followed needs no description. It is only sufficient to say that, from that hour, life opened anew for Gerald and his wife: that Eric was speedily nursed back into health; and that no shadow ever again came between father and son. But, to this day, the story of the burglary is unsuspected by Gerald Daunton.

Walter J. Mowbray.

Bowser's Memoranda.

He Jots down Many Little Things to Make History.

After Mr. Bowser had smoked his cigar and finished his newspaper the other evening he took a memorandum book from his pocket and began writing in it, and after awhile Mrs. Bowser remarked:

"You seem to have got a new idea. What is it you have been writing in that book for the last three nights?"

"Perhaps I can make you understand," he replied, after the lapse of two or three minutes. "Can you remember what happened to you at ten o'clock in the forenoon day before yesterday?"

"Nothing happened."

"That is, the house didn't catch fire or anyone attempt to murder you, but nevertheless things may have happened which would send a man to prison or clear him of a grave charge. The gravest charge sometimes turns upon the merest trifles. The life of a man in Glasgow was saved the other day because a woman remembered seeing him in an alley at a certain hour."

"And so you are jotting down things to save human life?"

"It may be. At any rate, I have set out to jot down most of the happenings of each day, and no one can say what results may follow. History may be made of some of my memoranda."

"I think you are wasting time over it. If you have an hour to spare, you had better work at that ingrowing toe nail of yours."

"Heavens, woman, must you always lug sore heels, toe nails and porous plasters into a conversation?" shouted Mr. Bowser as a rich, red colour showed in his face.

"But you are complaining of your toe," she protested.

"That may be, but don't mingle toes and brains. But for the diaries and memorandum books left behind by the people of the past, where would our historians have secured their material?"

"And what have you jotted down thus far for the benefit of future history?"

"Nothing of much account, but I have been at work only three days. I think my jotting might help to unravel a few mysteries, however. I will read you what I have written:

"Wednesday.—Arose at the usual hour. Looked out of the window and saw a man passing along, followed by a dog. Man had a disreputable appearance and a furtive look. Usual breakfast. Left the house at the usual hour. Saw a man in the Tube with blue goggles on. He seemed anxious to escape observation. Wonder if there is any connection between him and the man with the dog."

"I think there is," replied Mrs. Bowser. "I think the man with the dog watched outside while the goggle-eyed man sneaked in and drove the dagger to the poor baby's heart."

Mr. Bowser glared at her for a minute, and his hair could be heard curling, but with a powerful effort he restrained himself and continued :

" Thursday.—Arose as usual. Thermometer stood at 45 degrees above zero. Usual slip slop breakfast. Had scarcely left the house when I encountered the furtive looking man again. He had disguised himself, but I knew him at once. His dog was not following him."

" The poor animal had probably got tired out," said Mrs Bowser, who wanted to get even for the " slip slop breakfast."

" Your case will be attended to later on, and I will now read the rest : Had scarcely got on to a 'bus when I saw the man with the goggles. He was greatly perturbed, and it was evident that my presence upset him. I saw a wink pass between him and a man with a wart on his chin. Goggles got off apparently while I was arguing with a man who had stepped on my toes, but I can give the police his description. Arrived home at the usual hour. Mrs. Bowser and the cat in the hall to welcome me."

" Is that all for Thursday ? " asked Mrs. Bowser as he paused.

" Yes."

" Why didn't you add that you kicked the front door open when you arrived and that you told Mrs. Bowser you'd end your days in the poorhouse because you found a broken clothespeg at the gate ? "

" By thunder, woman, you are going too far, too far ! " he shouted as he rose up. " If I sat down here to read a chapter from the Bible, you'd manage to turn it to ridicule. You seem to have less sense as time passes."

" I was just wondering what the future historian would find in your notes to make history on," she quietly replied.

" How can we tell that the man with the dog is not a red handed anarchist plotting against the life of the lord mayor ? If so, my notes will convict him."

" I think he works in a livery stable down the street, and I have seen him and his dog a hundred times."

" But the man with the goggles ? Suppose he is a seditionist."

" Oh, the man with the goggles lived in the next street, and he got pepper in his eyes two weeks ago. Our own doctor attended him. I can't exactly understand how you saw him wink at another man. Did one of the goggles wink ? "

" None of your business ! If you like being an idiot, be one by all means. I know the value of these notes and shall keep them up. For instance, when I came home this evening——"

" Well ? " queried Mrs. Bowser as he waited.

" A suspicious looking person was hanging over Brown's gate. He was short and squat. He was run down at the heels. Suppose Brown is murdered in his bed to-night and the house robbed. My notes will furnish a clue to the police, and within twenty-four hours the murderer is arrested."

Mrs. Bowser was convinced that the suspicious person was a man who had been beating carpets for the Browns all the afternoon, but she didn't say so, and Mr. Bowser continued ;

" Since we have been sitting here this evening I have heard and made notes of two fire alarms, one ambulance call, a cry of seeming distress and the howl of a dog. They may not prove of value, and yet they may bring a criminal to justice."

" And you won't attend to your toe this evening ? " she asked as he walked about.

Mr. Bowser halted to bestow a look of contempt upon her and then started downstairs to bring up some wine from the cellar. He was thinking of future history as he descended and presently missed a step and turned head over heels, with a yell, and collided with the cellar bottom. Mrs. Bowser hurried down to find him sitting up in a daze, and after she had felt the bump on his head and ascertained that neither arm nor leg was broken she said :

" Friday Evening.—Have seen nothing of the man with the goggles or the man with the dog, but in descending my cellar stairs I engaged in a circus performance for the benefit of the future historian. Was assisted upstairs by my wife, the cook and the cat. No change in the system of government on my account. Come, Mr. Bowser."

He got up slowly and painfully and with many a sigh, and, leaning against the wall, he pointed his finger at her and tried to express his feelings in fitting language, but all he could get out was :

" Wo-woman, by th-thunder——"

M. Quad.

"A careless shoe-string, in whose tie
I see a wild civility."—*Herrick.*

" So you've made a choice at last ! " I said, or rather exclaimed, as my cousin Mary with beaming face finished a breathless statement, from which I had gathered, notwithstanding its involved and hesitating circumlocution, that she had become engaged to Harry Carlyon.

" I have," said Mary with decision.

" Well, it was time. I have always—you must forgive me, Mary, for saying so—thought you very heartless in your dealings with those two young men, Carlyon and Walsham " (Walsham was a second suitor and a rival to Carlyon). " You have kept those two good fellows dancing attendance on you these three years past, and have gone on playing off one against the other, never letting either know that you cared for the one more than for the other. Don't be angry when I tell you that everybody has regarded it as somewhat heartless and cruel."

" Playing off ! " Mary exclaimed, with a note of anger in her silvery voice. " I never did anything of the sort. They were both so good that I couldn't make up my mind to favour one at the expense of the other. My failure was too much kindness and an intense reluctance to be cruel. But people always are unjust."

" Always—when their judgment is not to our mind, Mary. And now that you have chosen, I don't think that your best friends will approve your choice."

" Approve ? Indeed ! Much I care whether they approve or not. But why, pray, should they not approve ? "

" I wonder you ask, the reason is so obvious. Carlyon's

not so young, not so rich, nor so handsome as Walsham; nor is he quite so agreeable and pleasant in conversation. Otherwise, I must confess they're about on a level."

"What do all those things matter if I like him better?"

"Very little, I suppose. In youth and beauty, and wealth and vivacity, my dear cousin, you have quite enough of your own, to make up for anything that may be wanting in Harry Carlyon. But it does seem odd that, after taking three years in coming to a decision, you should choose the one whom Society and your own set vote the less eligible of the two. It not only *seems* odd but it *is* odd, Mary; and I know for certain that Walsham was really very fond of you."

"I have pleased myself," said Mary decisively, by way of disposing of all further argument. "What would be the use to me of Society's opinion and people's 'say' if I made a wrong choice? I don't care a snap for what people say, or for Society's approval. I have given my hand to the man I like best, who likes me best, and who is best. And that's final," she concluded, with emphasis tossing her pretty head and stamping her equally pretty foot.

I ought to have said that my cousin Mary has the prettiest foot I have ever seen in my life. She's proud of it, and of the other one also, though she hasn't the least pride in her graceful figure, her handsome face, or her great masses of glorious chestnut hair.

But though she was anxious for finality. I could not let her run off so easily and satisfiedly with her hasty and unreasonable decision. It was so dogmatic and so eccentric that it roused in me the spirit of opposition and contention. I admired Walsham and liked Carlyon; Walsham would be best as a *beau*, Carlyon as a husband—I mean as the husband of a really serious woman. No one who knows Mary would dream of classing her as serious, while most people attribute that mood to me, and in such excess as to count it a failing.

It seemed to me so very absurd, not to say quite wrong, for Mary with her winning prettiness and pleasant mercurial ways to put aside a man like Walsham, whose nature has such a close affinity with her own, and pitch upon Carlyon, who is serious and reserved, that I felt strongly prompted to impress upon her the knowledge that her choice was impulsive and whimsical rather than reasonable and wise. Not that it affected me at all, except through my regard for her, and the earnest desire I always have had to see her happiness assured.

For three whole years these two friends had been honouring her with their attentions, and she had been quite unable to make up her mind as to which she would prefer. She had told me so scores of times when I had spoken to her about the unfairness of this indecision, and even warned her by quoting that wise old parable about the two stools. And now quite suddenly she appeared to have discovered that the one was immensely superior to the other, while that one was just the fellow whom I and her closest friends had voted was the least suitable, and were confident she would not select. It was quite erratic and unreasonable, not to say eccentric, on her part to act so. Therefore I felt obliged to say, in reply to her last remark:

"Well, you've made your choice, and I hope it will lead to the utmost happiness. But while I congratulate you, Mary, I wish to say that you really must not wonder if people think you unreasonable, and say that you have acted on a whim. Everybody made sure—I know Walsham's sisters did—that your choice would fall on him. You'll recollect that less than a fortnight ago you affirmed most seriously to me that you could not determine which of these two you liked best, while now you speak as if you had been in love with Carlyon all the time, and had never cared a straw for Walsham. In short, to use a sporting phrase, Carlyon's first and Walsham's nowhere. It really is—you must excuse me, Mary—most odd and whimsical. I should have thought Carlyon's serious ways would jar on you."

"Not at all; I like a man who is serious. It seems more manly. Walsham talks too much. And because he has the gift of talk he seems as if he were anxious to parade it, and, I half suspect, believe people ought to feel obliged to him for his readiness to entertain them. I quite admit that I was, until recently, unable to decide, though I have no doubt now that my heart was pledged on the side of Harry almost from the first. But it sometimes happens, I think—at least I am sure if I had more experience, I would think so—that a girl does not discover her love for a man unless he helps her to. Anyway, that's how I feel now. As to being whimsical, if you knew how it all came about you'd certainly think you were justified in saying that I am."

All this Mary said with a laughing inconsequential air, as though an engagement were on a level with the purchase of a new hat; but, of course, she may have thought more deeply. She was so innocently irresponsible, so childishly frank, and, withal, so ludicrously incoherent and self-contradictory, that I was forced from my seriousness into laughter. But my curiosity was the strongest emotion which her last remark excited, and I eagerly urged:

"Oh, do tell me how it all came about—all, every detail. I'll never breathe a word to anyone," I added seductively.

"Then you shall know," said Mary resolutely. "It was all decided as we walked back from the hockey match. Carlyon was on one side and Walsham was on the other. The latter was full of his droll stories, and he exercised all his wit to make us merry. And you know when it comes to a question of competition in entertaining talk, Carlyon is easily put in the shade. So it happened that he had not a word to say, while Walsham was just bubbling over with fun. I knew from a side-glance that Harry felt his deficiency. That evoked my sympathy, and my sympathy suggested that Walsham was pushing his advantage too strenuously.

"I was very uncomfortable, too, because my boot-lace had loosened, and was adding to the mud which I had gathered on the hockey ground. But, of course, I could not stop in the road to tie it. However, we had not gone far when Harry, the dear boy, who hardly ever took his eyes off my face, caught one of my downward glances and then saw that the lace-knot was untied. He immediately stopped and said: 'Your boot-lace is untied, Miss Warren; pray let me tie it up for you.' I felt my face glow, but, of course, I could not very well refuse an offer made so courteously; therefore assented. Harry at once bent his knee, and, notwithstanding my protests, planted my foot, dirty as it was, upon it, while he tied up the lace ever so neatly. I cannot tell you how much more comfortable it made me, and the walk to Melton Towers was very pleasant afterwards. When we reached it I asked him to come next evening and help us to entertain at the children's party. I did not ask Mr. Walsham. It was at the children's party that Harry proposed."

"So the tieing of the boot-lace decided all your future!"

"Ah, you don't understand," said Mary; "I was so uncomfortable before, and he tied it so nicely, and it made such a difference walking afterwards! Besides, you'll own that it was very thoughtful and affectionate of him?"

Of course I owned.

Owen Blayney.

Who's the Dupe?

The Story of a Visit to Homburg.

I.

A Disturbing Element!

"You needn't say another word, Fred. You are not married to me yet; you haven't even the right to object to me going anywhere, although your father and mother wish me to marry you—and if I want to go to Homburg, I shall go, and you and Mr. and Mrs. Fleming can follow or not, just as you feel inclined. But I shall go, and there is nothing more to be said about it!"

The words were uttered in a torrent of wrath, and at their conclusion the young, pretty, impetuous and well-dressed girl bounced from the dainty room in which she and Fred Fleming had been conversing, and the door banged to after her with a thud that made him jump.

The young man gazed at the closed portal gloomily. There were breakers ahead, and he did not know how to coax the wilful girl, whom, until this moment of his awakening, he had been inclined to look upon as his own exclusive property. He scratched his head, pulled his well-grown moustache, looked utterly foolish beneath his mantling colour, and rose with a sigh. Crossing to the mirror, he looked at his not unhandsome features with some show of curiosity. Then he gazed into the fire, kicked the fender reflectively, and sighed again.

"I'm hanged if I can understand it," he murmured at last. "Ever since Clara came of age, and has had her own way in everything, she has been a different girl. She used to be so kind and nice, and, hang it, she was fond of me. I suppose I shall have to drag mother and father after her with me to Homburg. It's a beastly nuisance, when we might be so easily married here, and remain at home as happy as two kittens. However, she means to have her own way, and there is an end of the matter. I'll tell her we'll all go—though I'm sure evil will come of it."

And with something very like bad language he sat down, waiting for Clara to come downstairs again.

He intimated his decision to his *fiancée* (for Clara Masters was really such) before he left the house, and, hailing a cab, drove sadly back to his chambers, where he set to work composing the letter to his parents which was to arrange the journey and date of starting.

Clara Masters assumed an attitude of complete indifference as to whether he accompanied her or not, and sought the companionship of her maid Elsie, from whom all her new ideas had been gathered.

"He says he will come with me to Homburg, Elsie," said she, with a pout, when she had gained the privacy of her dressing-room, to her maid who was preparing her things for the theatre that night.

The maid smiled significantly.

"Of course, Miss Clara," said she, "I knew he would. No man would let a pretty girl like you—to say nothing of a fortune of fifteen thousand a year—slip through his fingers without making an effort to save the situation."

"You think it is really my money he cares for, Elsie, and not poor me," asked the girl, while she clasped and unclasped her hands nervously, remembering every phase of Fred's really cold behaviour during their brief interview of the afternoon.

"Not a doubt about it," replied the maid sententiously, smoothing out a beautiful silken skirt.

"Oh, you make me think so," said Clara, almost crying. "And yet in the old days, when he used to come and see me at my guardian, Mr. Mansfield's house, I am sure he really loved me. There is a change in his manner now I know; but yet I think it is I who have changed, Elsie, and not he."

"Nonsense," cried the maid, taking out a jewel case, opening it, and showing the clusters of glittering diamonds which lay on their bed of turquoise plush within. "Of course he was fond of you in the old days, and so were his father and mother, who were on the look-out for a wealthy wife for their only son. Didn't he know even then that you were coming into all this money which your father left you? You were just as good a catch then as now. You come with me to Homburg, my dear. I am older than you, and know the world. You'll have chances there which you would never have in England!"

Clara sat down dejectedly.

"That's the one thing I dread, Elsie," she cried. "That a man should marry me only for the sake of my money. I want a husband who can give me his heart as well as his hand. And when you say that about Fred it makes me wish never to see him again!"

She was upon the point of crying. The maid went to her.

"Don't worry about him," she said. "Wait till you get to Homburg. There are millionaires there as handsome as paint, who would be only too glad to marry you for your beauty, and who would lavish their fortune upon you, giving you everything your heart can desire. Do you think if I were a girl like you I'd waste myself upon a young man who only thinks of your money? Why, when I was in Homburg last—let me see, it is ten or more years ago—there was a young Italian nobleman staying there, of good family and just turned twenty. He was such a handsome man, and heir to a great fortune. Count Frascini was his name, and he had quite a passion for English women, though he was a good young man, and didn't drink and gamble like the rest. If you met him, my dear, you would know what love means; and he's not the only one by many a score. Go to the Stein Hotel in Louisen Strasse, give out that you are comparatively poor, see the magnificent gentlemen that throng the place, and make your choice, when you have found some young man like Count Frascini, who will love you for yourself, and marry you, though he thinks you haven't a penny; and you will live happily ever afterwards, as the children's story books say. Such mercenary young men as Master Frederick Fleming should be taught their lesson, and you must teach it him, my dear."

For two months, ever since she had taken Elsie for her maid, Clara had listened to such talk as this, and being a young, inexperienced girl, just of age, and left to her own resources by the death of her guardian, and blessed with a large fortune which she thought the objective of every young man who addressed her, it was small wonder that the more mature woman should have influenced her to such an extent that Fred now looked at her in sheer amazement.

That night at the theatre was a miserable one for Clara. She was discontented with the world, with herself, with Fred for not browbeating her more, with her maid, and, finally, with the play, which she declared was "silly"; and at last when they arrived home she retired to her room to sleep, worn out both in mind and body. Ill at ease, she tried to foretell the result of her forthcoming visit to Homburg, which in her heart she wished she had never arranged.

She loved Fred, she confessed, as she lay there unable to sleep, but since he cared only for her money and not herself, she felt cold and reserved towards him; and seeing in his desire to accompany her to Homburg a wish on his part not to lose sight of her or her money, she realised she was being swept farther apart from him than ever.

However, so far as the journey to Homburg was concerned, she had already booked a passage for herself and her maid, and she would not draw back; and so at the end of the week she and Elsie, and Fred and Mr. and Mrs. Fleming left London together.

It was an awkward journey that, conducted for the most part in silence, relieved only by moments of forced and strained conversation; with Fred glaring daggers of wrath at the maid Elsie, Mr. and Mrs. Fleming at a loss what to say or do, and Clara engrossed in a yellow-backed two-and-sixpenny novel, entitled "The Millionaire Adventurer"!

The ultimate arrival at the Stein Hotel, in Louisen Strasse, at Homburg, brought about only a partial breaking up of the clouded atmosphere, and dinner was partaken of by the jaded party with such dull attention that one would have thought they were presiding at the consumption of baked meats at a funeral.

The maid Elsie, who sat at the outside edge of the table, seemed the gayest of the lot of them. Perhaps she was thinking of her former visit to Homburg, which in a moment of confidence she had confessed to Miss Clara had been with a young and fascinating widow, who captivated all hearts, and ultimately eloped with the leader of the band in the kiosk in the Park, who left behind him a weeping wife and a family of eight!

The maid's restless eyes wandered to right and left during dinner. She was trying to pick out somebody she had met there before, thought Clara, and after all, was it not natural?

Presently a tall, good-looking man entered. He was dressed in immaculate evening clothes, and he sat down at a table opposite, where Clara did not fail to notice him. The maid's eyes lit up with an expression of delight at the sight of him. She kicked out at Clara under the table and winked. Fred Fleming did not see the wink, but he felt the kick and emitted a yell.

"I wish you'd be careful, my good woman," he said, with a vicious glance at Elsie. "You've hurt my shin!"

"I wished to attract Madam's attention," said the maid, hanging her head to hide a blush.

As for Clara she was utterly mystified, but she regarded the handsome stranger with more attention. When at last the party rose and prepared to leave the room, she received her enlightenment.

Her maid Elsie clutched her by the arm.

"Good gracious!" she gasped. "Miss Clara, Miss Clara, who would have thought it? It's 'im! it's 'im!"

"I wish you wouldn't be so silly, and make such an exhibition of yourself, Elsie!" remonstrated her mistress irritably. "And perhaps you will have the goodness to explain who 'im' is?"

"Why, it's 'im—Count Algo Frascini!" murmured the maid, ready to faint. "And still unmarried by the look of 'im. This is fatality!"

"You may call it fatality, or what you like," cried Miss Clara, with a toss of her head as she swept out of the room. "I should term it nonsense!"

But all the same she turned and directed a last glance at the handsome stranger of whom she had heard so much, and she saw he was watching her with a fascinating smile upon his face. Her heart beat wildly.

II.

"The Little Drama at the Stein Hotel!"

To anyone but an unsuspecting and easily led girl the coincidence of the Count's appearance at the Stein Hotel at such a time would have appeared, to say the least of it, suspicious; but Clara did not think; like most women, she was utterly devoid of logic.

And so in three days the introduction to this distinguished foreigner was accomplished; at the end of the week he was on good terms with her; at the end of a fortnight he was more her lover than poor Fred Fleming, and that young man was reduced to the utmost depths of despair.

He postured with a foil in his hands before a large cheval mirror in his dressing-room, vowing he would kill his enemy; he spent his evenings with Ma and Pa at the theatre, where he had the pleasure of playing gooseberry to Clara and the odious Count (whom nothing could repress); he took the water

She turned and directed a last glance at the handsome stranger of whom she had heard so much.

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which nearly killed him; he lost mad sums gambling wildly at the tables, and took to drinking brandy in large quantities, which did not raise him in the estimation of the girl he loved.

At last, unable to endure it any longer, he ventured to remonstrate with Clara, with the result that, under the advice of her maid Elsie, she broke off the engagement, and in a rage he went upstairs and packed his trunks. But he did not leave Homburg. The thought of leaving Clara there at the mercy of any adventurer who might choose to come along sobered him and bade him stay; and so the whole party remained at the Stein in absolute estrangement, and the playing of the comedy went on.

The curtain on the first act showed the triumph of Count Frascini, who, like most foreigners, could not take his honours easily, but posed and put on side enough for the whole of Italy.

And so things went on until one night when Fred retired, without locking his bedroom door. He was upon the point of undressing when there came the sound of a stealthy tread in the corridor without, and the next moment, to his utter astonishment, the door was opened and a woman entered.

She paid absolutely no heed to his cry of warning, and, after carefully closing the door, crossed the room and sat herself down in the armchair by the side of the dressing-table.

"My dear, good woman!" said Fred, aghast, recognising her as the lady who had arrived two days before with enough luggage to fill the hold of a vessel, and with whose prim appearance he had been much taken up at the time. "What on earth are you doing here? I really must warn you that unless you leave my room immediately I shall be under the painful necessity of ringing for the servants!"

But the lady paralysed him by placing her finger to her lips, winking her eye, and taking off her hair, which exposed underneath the well-oiled hirsute adornment of a man.

"Freddy, my boy," said the erstwhile lady with a smile. "Forgive my unladylike entrance. But I couldn't help it, and I hadn't a chance of speaking to you before with the guests and the waiters constantly watching us. I had to have a talk with you, and so I risked a lot by coming here to-night; and now I want to ask you a few questions."

"Good gracious, it's Charteris!"

And Freddy fell back upon the bed aghast as he recognised this man as the well-known detective of that name whom he had the pleasure of meeting at Wiesbaden a year before, when they had managed to become the best of friends.

"You're right, it is Charteris!" exclaimed the detective, whose work was confined exclusively to the Continental cities. "Glad to meet you again, Mr. Fleming!"

"But what on earth does this mean?" asked Fred, running his nervous fingers through his hair.

"Tell you all about that later. Got to ask you a few questions at once for I mustn't linger here. First of all, is the young lady named Miss Clara Masters your *fiancée*?"

"She was until a week ago," groaned Freddy.

"Ah, until she was fascinated by Count Frascini. I think I understand. Now, tell me—how long has her maid been with her?"

"For six months or more—and she's the devil!"

"Hum, she'll not grow wings!"

"But why do you ask?"

"That's my business. But you may rely upon one thing—I'm your friend. Now, not a word to anyone that you know me—and don't address me in company. Tell me—Miss Masters has money, has she not?"

"Yes!"

"And her solicitors, the trustees of her father's estate, are Messrs. Gordon and Gordon, of Wauchope Street, City, I believe?"

"Yes!" gasped the stupefied young man, astounded at the extent of the detective's information.

"Good; that's all I wanted to know. And now if news arrives that the young lady has lost all her money, don't be surprised. Invested money has a way of losing itself sometimes; and I have reason to believe that Messrs. Gordon and Gordon's investments have *failed*. And now, good night. I'll go this way, if you don't mind. My room's next to yours. I had it arranged that way. Caution is the greatest thing in these cases. Ta-ta—see you in the morning, but mind, not a word—nor a sign—that you know me."

And without another word the man in the skirts vanished into what Fred Fleming firmly believed to be only a cupboard, but which was in reality an entrance leading into the next bedchamber. The young man saw the door close while he sat with his mouth wide open in amazement.

He sat for hours dreaming and thinking, and the next morning when he went down to breakfast there was the woman Charteris—or the *man* Charteris, to be correct—seated at a side table, lost in the columns of a lady's journal and sipping coffee!

The Count was seated at a table with Clara and her maid. He paid the pretty girl devoted attention and glared ferociously at Fred. He seemed in greater favour than ever. But while the meal was proceeding a page boy entered with a telegram which he handed to Miss Masters, and stood by while she read it, respectfully waiting for her answer.

The contents caused the girl to turn pale, after a moment she crushed the piece of paper between her dainty fingers.

Count Frascini watched these proceedings with an interested eye, and Fred noticed that Charteris lifted his eyes to the rim of the paper she—no, he—held, and glanced across to the neighbouring table.

"Ze contents pain you, Signorita?" said the Italian, with what he meant to be a loving smile. "Will you please per-mit me to read the telegram?"

She paused for a moment. During the last few days she had almost given him a right to inquire into everything which concerned her. Her maid Elsie had done her best for him, and as she thought of the generous nature of this man who had been upheld to her as being a paragon of all the virtues, she decided to let him know what the message said, and passed him the sheet of paper.

Fred saw Charteris positively wink at him.

The Count first of all saw that the message was signed Gordon and Gordon, and its contents positively startled him.

"My dear young lady," the words began, "it is with the greatest sorrow I inform you that the investment of the money left you by your lamented and respected father in African Gubat Mines, and in North-Eastern Four per Cents., has turned out disastrously, and that the entire fortune so disposed has been irrevocably lost. I shall be glad to see you upon the earliest possible opportunity!"

The Count's face was white with sympathy when he had read the last word, and he tugged at his waxed moustache in his excitement.

"Scan-der-lous!" he gasped. "They should be prosecuted! Signorita, per-mit-a me!"

And without waiting for Clara's sanction he passed the paper to Fred, who, reading it, thought Charteris must be a wizard.

They were an unhappy party at the Stein for the rest of the day.

Count Frascini wandered about with his arms crossed and gazed vacantly out into the street, where the rain fell in torrents as befitted such a mournful occasion. Clara had gone to her room, and the nobleman, speaking her name in a soft voice, sent countless messages of condolence to her by her maid, with whom he talked long and earnestly, doubtless discussing the pretty English girl, her change of fortune, and how good he was going to be to her after they were married.

Fred was unbearable. First of all rude to the waiters, then insulting to the proprietor, who followed him about in an attitude of abject apology, he sat himself in a large armchair in the smoking-room, and drank brandy and soda in sheer desperation. Where had his chance gone to now?

The Count with his great fortune and his family name could metaphorically "wipe the floor with him," and he a Britisher too!

And all the time there was the meddlesome old lady—known to Fred as the detective Charteris—hovering about in the vicinity of the public rooms, turning over paper after paper in a vain search for something he apparently could not find. Count Frascini was never very far away from him Fred noticed.

Mr. and Mrs. Fleming giving up their son in despair, went off to the Zoological Gardens and got wet, and later in the

afternoon, Fred, making up his quarrel with the proprietor, invited him to a game of billiards, when, playing with more force than judgment, he lost heavily.

There was tragedy in the air, and for the first time since she had entered Clara's service, the maid Elsie seemed downcast.

Even she at last sought her room with a raging toothache.

At seven in the evening, Count Frascini packed his bags, suddenly remembering an important engagement in Vienna. He notified his intending departure to the proprietor, telling him he would be back in a few days, and arranged for the delivery of a perfumed note to Miss Clara, whom he could not see owing to her indisposition.

At dinner the maid Elsie was late, wasting some time in her mistress' bedroom, where she remained to put things straight; and Count Frascini was not present at all, much to the relief of Freddy and the sorrow of the dejected girl; who this time sat three tables away from her lover to whom she would not speak a word.

At ten o'clock the maid Elsie could not be found, nor could anyone remember having seen her since dinner; and Freddy noticed too, that the woman—or rather the man Charteris—was also absent.

At half-past ten a well-dressed man in a frock coat and a shiny silk hat, all fuss and fashion, entered the lounge and approached Clara, who was sitting in a glum silence with her back to Freddy. He took off his headgear as he came, and drew something from his pocket, which he held towards her.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Masters," he said apologetically, "but this is your jewel-case, I believe?"

"Yes!" she gasped, with staring eyes, as she snatched it from him. "How dare you take it, sir?"

"Your pardon, madam—I did not take it!" he replied, with a fixed expression. "Maid Elsie—alias Madame Fromage—alias Betty Gough—alias Julia Smith—alias the Countess Frascini—really Eliza Smith—*did*. Notorious Continental thief and swindler—wanted to lay my hands on her for a long time. I restore case, madam! Will you see if contents are correct? My name's Charteris!"

Clara stared at him as though she thought he was mad.

"Fact, I assure you, madam," said Charteris, with a charming smile. "I arrested them both at the station just as they were about to enter the express to Vienna. Had warrant prepared anticipating events just as they turned out. Got accomplice nicely. Notorious scoundrel, Count Frascini—real name Bob Smith of Bermondsey—ex-actor—clever rogue—stage not well paid enough for him; duped him splendidly with that telegram from Gordon and Gordon!"

And he chuckled inwardly at his own cleverness.

"Really," said Clara, with withering scorn as she rose to her feet and cast a glance of hatred at Fred, who was dancing something in the nature of a Highland fling in a corner with the corpulent and unlucky proprietor, "there is nothing to laugh at, sir! I fail to see that there is a joke in the matter."

"When shall the wedding be, dearest?"

"Oh, but there *is!*" said Charteris, sobering down. "Sad life this—must laugh dull care away sometimes—though it's unprofessional. Your fortune's all right, my dear lady—Gordon and Gordon helped *me* to save *you*—that's all! Frascini took the thing seriously! Ha! ha! ha! ha! He told maid to steal your jewels seeing no hope of getting anything else. And I took *her* red-handed! Sad life this. Shall want you to appear as evidence against them, madam, so please don't leave Homburg too soon. And now, having returned you your property and assured you that your fortune is quite safe, I must get to the lock-up and see that Frascini and company are stowed away in comfort."

"Sir," cried the blushing girl, "I think your conduct is—is—is—unmanly!"

"Quite right," he muttered, as he watched her sweep from the room with a stamp of defiance directed at Fred. "It's womanly sometimes—even effeminate!" And he chuckled as he thought of his disguise.

A moment later he was caught in Fred's arms and whirled round.

"Charteris," yelled the latter, "you're a brick—a regular—amazon! How can I ever thank you?"

"Don't waste time on me," he answered, "comfort her! When a woman realises what a fool she's been, she wants it. Glad to have been of service to you—and great coup for me. Go and kiss, and make it up again. See you to-morrow. Good-night!"

And without more ado he glided from the room.

The guests had, for the most part, retired. Only Mr. and Mrs. Fleming remained in the room. Freddy ordered a cigar, and crossed to them.

"Dad," he said, "you got wet through seeing the monkeys this morning—take mother to bed!"

"But, my lad—it's time you turned in too."

"No, dad, it's near the hour when the ghosts appear. I want to wait for mine here!"

A few minutes later he was alone. He sat by the fire smoking and thinking, and there was a smile on his face, he was almost happy.

"Fred! Fred!"

His ghost had come—the ghost of a past.

"God bless you, child! I thought you might come to me. But dry your eyes—you mustn't cry, Clara!"

"Oh, I'm not crying because of them!" she sobbed. "I am weeping to think how blind—how selfish—how foolish I've been—and how g-g-g-oo-d you've always been to me!"

He rose and kissed her, and, doing so, saw the proprietor watching them; he signed to him to withdraw, and the old man went out rubbing his hands at the thought of another honeymoon couple in the spring.

"When shall the wedding be, dearest?" asked Freddy, wishing to make sure of her this time.

"I said—I wouldn't marry—you—while I—until I had lost my fortune—Freddy, dear!"

"But, child, you did lose it—to-day!"

"So—so—I did, Fred!" she gasped, her eyes opening as she saw the way out of her difficulty. "But only for a few hours!"

"Freddy," she whispered a minute later, "I want you to forgive me, and I want you to forgive that—that man Frascini too; for he's shown me really how very—very much I care for you!"

For answer he gave her a kiss, and led her from the room with his arm round her waist as there was no one by to see.

The stout proprietor crept out of the shadow and watched them as they ascended the broad staircase together. He smiled, for that wedding and honeymoon trip in the spring had become a certainty!

"Ah!" said he, to himself, "I must tackle Mistare Fleming on that subject—to-morrow!"

A. Steffens-Hardy.

Have You Met Her?

"Did you read this, dear?" said Mrs. Grigsby to Orlando the other night. "It's a strange case. A harmless lunatic imagines that he's a grain of corn, and will not go into the yard lest a chicken eat him. Isn't it an odd delusion?" "Oh, the world is full of such delusions, dear," replied Grigsby. "I know a harmless lunatic who seems to imagine she's a piece of cheese, and she will fly from a room when a mouse enters it, for fear the little creature will devour her."

Dangerous Ground.

He: "Jolly conservatory, Miss Matchems, isn't it?" She: "Yes; quite renowned for the number of proposals that have been made here." He: "H'm—yes. By-the-bye, they're beginning the waltz." She: "It was here that Charlie Gudgeon proposed to Miss Pyke. They were sitting here, just as we are now, and he said, quite abruptly, just as you might say to me, 'Will you be mine?' and she said, as I might say to you——" He: "Ah, yes—quite so; but hadn't we better have a spin round?"

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5. In the event of the prize being divided, only one share will go to each successful competitor, no matter how many duplicate attempts he may send in.
6. No competitor may receive the assistance of professional competition solvers whose advertisements appear in the Press. Every person who enters for this competition must do so only on this understanding, and those selected as winners may be asked to satisfy us that they have not contravened this condition

The first prize of £10 will be given to the reader from whom we receive coupons containing the greatest number of correct solutions. The second prize will be given to the sender of the next most nearly correct solutions, and so on. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be awarded at the discretion of the Editor, whose decision is final.

LAST LIST: Cut to edge—>

Example:
To flow gently..... Ouse.

46. A game at marbles	46	.....
47. To press hard	47	.....
48. Current of air, press forward with impetuosity	48	.....
49. A drawer for cash	49	.....
50. To convey on a cart	50	.....
51. The brand-goose	51	.....
52. To scatter over	52	.....
53. A freshwater fish of the carp tribe	53	.....
54. To come from	54	.....
55. Hide the ocean	55	.....
56. A thick shrub	56	.....
57. An indefinite quantity	57	.....
58. Of no use	58	.....
59. The name of a colouring substance	59	.....
60. Piece of rock crystal for adorning branch candlesticks	60	.....

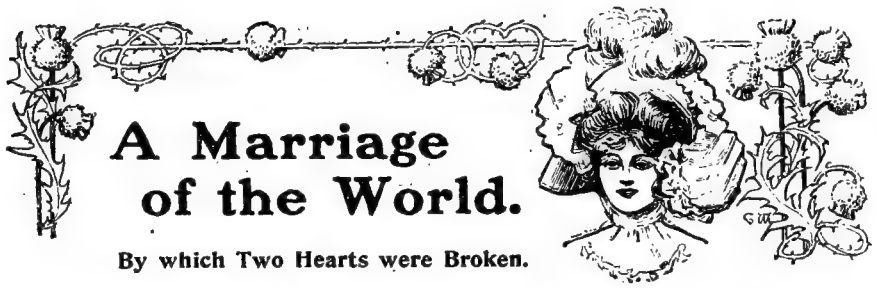
Name.....

Address.....

.....

Cut to edge—>

The Editor hopes that Competitors will avail themselves of this opportunity of inclosing a few stamps for the Fresh Air Fund.



A Marriage of the World.

By which Two Hearts were Broken.

The steady dip of the oars ceased; the boat drifted slowly among the sweet-scented lilies and tall rushes. The man sat with crossed arms and looked moodily across the little sunlit lake, not seeming to watch the girl opposite, who stooped and picked a lily bud, holding it caressingly an instant, then, her mood changing, throwing it petulantly into the water.

"You knew I was engaged all the time, Wilbur," she broke the silence.

"And I knew—I know you love me," the man rejoined, bringing his eyes slowly back to the girl's face.

"But it was unfair—cowardly of you to make me say so," she said, looking into the water again.

"I don't see why," he said. "I knew, without your telling. It did no harm."

"It did no good, either," she answered, meeting his glance, full of sneering bitterness, with her great dark eyes. "I should have been more careful; I should not have received attentions from you; but——"

"Well?"

"Well, Mr. Harrison is so—so very busy, and he trusted me so perfectly, you know," with a little catch in her voice.

"I understand; and he is wealthy and has a high position, and of course——"

"Don't, Wilbur! You hurt me!" the girl interrupted, hastily. "It isn't really so much that he is rich and popular as that—we have always been meant for each other, and of course he has never had a thought of another woman, and he has been so truly devoted to me all these years; and to break the engagement would make such a—no, I can't think of it!" she added, after a moment's pause. "My family would never forgive me; and besides, I owe it to Mr. Harrison to keep my word."

"I shall not urge you further, Miss Preston. It would be too presumptuous to insist upon your giving up being the wife of the Reverend Mr. Harrison for a penniless duffer who has nothing to urge but that he loves you and you love him."

The girl's lips trembled pitifully. "Row back now, Wilbur," she whispered, and without another word he lifted the oars and sent the little boat gliding out into the water.

The summer visitors were neither fashionable nor many in this locality, and these two had depended upon each other for amusement; had rowed together on the little lake, taken rambles through daisy-strewn fields, watched the moon rise from the wide old balcony, and played duets in the music room on rainy days, and—fallen desperately in love with each other. The awakening had come with the passionate declaration of love.

The beautiful daughter of the world has counted the cost, balanced her heart against her reason, during the whole of the short summer night, and has concluded that they must part; so they say good-bye at the hotel entrance (he is to leave in a few hours). It is better so, the girl thinks wearily. There are people strolling about on the balcony; so they clasp hands, look once into each other's eyes, and part.

* * * *

Rev. Edward Harrison is supposed to be dictating his Sunday sermon—one of those eloquent sermons which have made him famous. He is a fine man, so his many admirers will tell you; handsome, wealthy, and a great student, labouring for the good of his fellow-men. He is working himself to death, the sympathetic ladies of his parish contend, and sorely needs the holiday which his church insists upon his taking after his marriage to Miss Preston. He has stayed at his post all through the heat of the summer, refusing to leave when urged to take a few days' rest at the seaside or in the country. Such unselfishness! But no—such selfishness; for there is more of an attraction here; something which charms him more than the tossing waste of waters or the flowering splendour of the country. It is a slender girl with great blue eyes, soft curling hair, and the most bewitching manner in the world. The dignified divine watches her entranced, as she flits about his study.

She is one of those tiny, bird-like creatures whose every motion is full of grace. He forgets his text in watching her snowy, dimpled hand flying across the paper—for she is only his secretary, a poor girl in whom one of the ladies of the church became interested.

He considered himself sufficiently in love with his *fiancée*—the match is so entirely satisfactory to society and so suitable in all respects, and then, Miss Preston is so much in love with him, poor girl! It would break her heart if he should prove unfaithful—it would never do. He paced back and forth, with his large, white hands clasped behind him. Why, why had this tiny, bright-haired girl come into his calm, unworldly life—and coming, crept into his heart and refused to be banished by all the sophistries he could command.

He turned sharply as he passed her and laid his hand upon her head. She looked up, her face dimpling with smiles.

"I ought to tell you that—that I am engaged," he began, his voice slightly husky.

The girl's face grew deadly white.

"Yes, I have been a cowardly villain to make love to you, Dora—I— I wonder that you have not heard that I am to be married very soon."

"I heard you were," she answered (but did not add that she did not believe it).

"Ah, I am glad. My *fiancée*, Miss Preston, will return soon—she will be here on Saturday, I think. Oh, Dora, help me!" he said, sitting down weakly.

"Would you rather I would go away?" she asked.

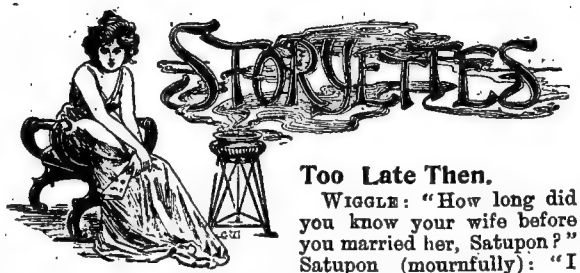
"I'm afraid it would be best," he answered, looking at her miserably.

"I will go—to-morrow—and probably will not be back until after the wedding," she said, her attempt to speak lightly failing sadly.

* * * * * *

A fortnight later the Rev. Mr. Harrison and the beautiful Miss Preston were married, and were overwhelmed with the congratulations of their many friends.

Gertrude Keene.



Too Late Then.

Wiggle: "How long did you know your wife before you married her, Satupon?" Satupon (mournfully): "I didn't know her at all till I married her."

From the Lips of Experience.

"I feel now quite satisfied that there is no life so happy as a married one." "And how long have you been married?" "Since last Wednesday."

He Could Show Her.

"Johnny," said the pretty teacher, "what is a kiss?" "I can't exactly put it in words," returned the boy; "but if yer really wanter know, I can show yer."

Two Lights.

"You are the light of my life," she said to him as she bid him good-night at the front door. "Put out that light," growled her father at the head of the stairs. And the front door slammed.

A Sweet Girl Graduate.

He (at dinner): "May I assist you to the cheese, Miss Girton?" She (just graduated): "Thanks, no. I am very comfortable where I am. But you may assist the cheese to me, if you will."

Expectant.

"I hope you appreciate the fact, sir, that in marrying my daughter, you marry a large-hearted, generous girl?" "I do, sir (with emotion), and I hope she inherits these qualities from her father."

Simple and Effective.

Daughter: "Yes, I know, Mr. Staylate comes very often, but it isn't my fault. I do everything I can do to drive him away." Old Gentleman: "Fudge! I haven't heard you sing to him once."

Quite Inadequate.

"What did Miss X. say when you asked her for her hand?" "She merely asked me how I made a living." "And you said——?" "With my brains." "And what did she say?" "I hadn't capital enough for two."

A Patient Maiden.

"Another letter from Alfred? When do you expect to marry him?" "He has two more years at Harrow. After that he will go to Oxford; when he has finished there he will set out to make his fortune. When he has made his fortune we shall be married. Oh, it all seems so beautiful."

A Soft Answer.

"Jane, I saw that policeman speak to you. That's the third policeman I've seen speaking to you this morning. I can't allow that." "No, ma'am. But the policemen always do admire baby so; they can't 'elp stopping and askin' about 'im. They all say as they never see such a fine child."

A Shrewd Husband.

Husband: "I am not ready to go out walking yet." Wife: "But I am, and we must go immediately." Husband: "But, my dear, your hat is not on straight." Wife: "Dear me, isn't it? Wait a minute till I go to my room and put it right." Exit wife, for half an hour, and her shrewd husband completes his work.

Easily Done.

A rich miser has a niece whom he proclaims to be his heiress, but who has never seen any of his money. "Your niece is twenty years old," said a friend; "you ought to do something towards getting her settled." "Oh, well," replied the miser, "I will pretend to be ill."

From Her Point of View.

"Do you understand the importance of the step you are about to take?" inquired a Newcastle mother of her daughter, who was about to be married. "I should say that I did," was the answer. "Three of the prettiest girls in the town are to be my bridesmaids, and I shall have to look my best or they will outshine me."

Why She Liked Venus.

A lady who saw that her servant girl seemed to take a certain interest in the objects of art in her parlour said to her: "Which one of those figures do you like best, Mary?" "This one, mum," said Mary, pointing to the armless Venus of Milo. "And why do you like the Venus best?" "Sure, it's the aisiest to doost, mum," answered the girl.

A Misunderstanding.

Sweet Little Maiden: "Is there a letter for me?" Important Uniformed Clerk: "Who's me?" Sweet Little Maiden: "I'm Gladys Cummin." Important Official: "Yes, I daresay you are glad he's coming; but what's your name?" Sweet Little Maiden: "How dare you? My name is Gladys Cummin," Important Official: "Oh—oh—I beg your pardon."

Why She Named Baby.

Miss Gush: "And, Ethel, dear, what is the baby's name?" Mrs. Newmother: "I've named him Ethelbert Algernon." Miss Gush: "But I always thought the father named the boys?" Mrs. Newmother: "If you could hear what his father calls him when he is walking the floor with him in the early dawn, you wouldn't wonder that I took matters in my own hands."

Taking it out of the Governor.

Gentleman (to shop assistant): "This seems a good umbrella. Will it wear well?" Assistant: "No. It will fade after the first wetting." Gentleman: "How straightforward! You are an honour to your profession." Assistant: "Oh, it's not that. I proposed to my master's daughter last night, and she rejected me. I am taking it out of the guv'nor."

Chances.

"If I had half a chance I'd marry," remarked a handsome millionaire bachelor to a good-looking girl. "But you never will have," she asserted. "Why not?" he asked, somewhat taken aback. "Because," and she smiled in a way that fascinated him, "every chance in your case is a whole one." It was the merest chance she took, but it netted her a million and a man.

How it was Done.

Mrs. Hicks: "I want you to match a piece of silk for me this morning; but you are such a stupid thing, that I know you will make a blunder." Hicks: "You evidently take me for an idiot. If I mistake the exact shade, texture, or even the make, I will buy you a box of gloves." (An hour later.) "Here, Tape, get me a quarter of a yard like that. If you make a mistake I'll get you sacked. See?"

The Old Problem.

Mrs. Meadow: "I hate to tell you, Mrs. Suburbs, but really, you ought to know it. Every time I've run into the city lately, I've met your husband in the return train, and every time he was paying marked attentions to some woman by his side, and every time it was a different woman. I've seen him with a dozen of 'em." Mrs. Suburbs (quietly): "We have been trying to get a servant girl who would stay."

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DOROTHEA.

A Charming Story of a Misdeed which Brought About a Life Happiness.

Dorothea ran up the long flight of stone steps, and inserted her latch-key in the door of the little flat.

She was out of breath but gay at heart, for her singing had been a success, and life promised better things for herself and Hugh.

The opening so long wished for had come at last, and, perhaps——

She checked herself with a smile, and entered.

The sitting-room was dimly lighted. The lamp was dying out, and only a few red embers showed in the grate.

A chill air momentarily overcame her; Hugh was always out late now.

She went to the door of his bedroom, it was ajar and the room in darkness.

Returning to the sitting-room an envelope placed against the clock on the mantelpiece caught her eye.

It contained a note from her brother.

"When you get this I shall be on my way to America, if I haven't blown my brains out. I've taken three hundred of Drysdale's money, and daren't face him. I hate this narrow money-grubbing existence, with our miserable little economies. I'll write when I'm in safety, and will work like a slave to pay it back, but I feel so jolly miserable that I wish I was dead. I'm a disgrace to you, poor old Dorothea. Good-bye. I can't stand office work any longer."

The scrawled, incoherent note fell from Dorothea's hand.

She glanced round with wide horrified eyes, and for a moment everything whirled before her.

The intense selfishness of the note hardly struck her, it was the disgrace.

Hugh was a thief, at any moment liable to be apprehended.

The lamp flickered and ran up suddenly, then went out, leaving her in darkness, and when dawn crept under the blinds it found her still there looking with uncomprehending eyes into the blackness of the grate. The world outside was awakening, and the commonplace sounds brought Dorothea back to stern facts.

She shivered in her thin evening gown, and glanced about her at the dimly-defined familiar objects in the room.

Each little chair and table, book-shelf, and cushion meant some personal self-denial to herself, not to Hugh. She had worked with a seriousness not customary to twenty years to make home pleasanter to Hugh.

The note lying at her feet caught her gaze, and she shivered, but not with cold this time. Hitherto disgrace had passed them by, and she was glad that neither father nor mother had lived to see their idol's downfall.

She picked up the note and went into her brother's room. It was all in disorder. Every drawer was pulled open, clothes lay in all directions, a half-smoked cigarette and a 'bus ticket lay upon the bed. Everything spoke of hasty departure.

She mechanically closed the gaping chest of drawers, smoothed the counterpane, and folded away the coats, then shut the door behind her as solemnly as though someone lay there dead. She had never relied much upon Hugh, but now for the first time in her life it began to dawn upon her what it meant to be alone.

She changed her gown and made herself a cup of tea, to eat was impossible. Facts had to be faced now. She had made her plans in the silence of the night. She left some directions for the caretaker's wife, and, when it was time, took a 'bus to the city.

Mr. Drysdale had not yet arrived, the clerk told her, and for what seemed interminable cycles of time Dorothea sat waiting.

She found herself going over the events of the previous evening, looking back at herself as at another personality, seeing a girl whose opening had arrived, a girl whose hopes were as fresh as her voice, a girl who had hailed the singing of two songs at a great reception as the first step on the ladder of fame.

She came to herself again when a clerk told her that Mr. Drysdale would see her. She had refused to send in her name.

A sudden light flashed into Drysdale's keen face as she entered. He had been at the reception of the night before, and, unimpressionable man of forty as he was, had been haunted ever since by the singer and the song. He was a man of sudden impulses and strong convictions, and he had told himself unhesitatingly there and then that this was the one woman in the world for him. And now here she was, breaking in upon his thoughts by some strange movement of fate.

The pallor of her face touched him indescribably when he contrasted it with the gaiety of the night before; there was an air of almost terrified appeal in her grey eyes that hurt him and brought the practical side of him uppermost.

He bowed and asked her to be seated, but she only bowed in response, and faced him, her hand pressed against the writing-table as if for support.

"You are Mr. Drysdale?" she asked, "I am Hugh Carmichael's sister—and I have come to explain—to tell you——" Her voice broke off. The grief in her eyes made Drysdale involuntarily glance away for an instant.

"Pray sit down," he said; then, trying to help her out a little, "your brother is not ill, I hope?"

Dorothea drew a quivering breath. How simple that would be to tell; how infinitely easy to say that he was dead.

"He is well," she said, still refusing the proffered chair. "How can I tell you, that he is—that he has——"

"Yes?"

"Stolen your money like any common thief," said Dorothea rapidly. "Oh, I wonder if you can realise the shame it is to tell?"

She sat down and buried her face in her hands.

Drysdale's eyes were keen and alert for a moment as if a half-shaped conviction had taken definite form, then his expression changed again.

He drew a chair forward and sat down.

"I am deeply distressed for you," he said. "Tell me all about it quietly; it may be a relief to talk it over, and I am not pressed for time. I feared that your brother was in difficulties lately, he has been so unlike himself; he was a favourite of mine, you know, such a handsome lad."

Dorothea looked up, gratitude in every quivering line of her face.

"Ah, how kind you are," she exclaimed.

"Where is he?" asked Drysdale quietly.

Dorothea laid the note before him.

"You have a right to keep it, if you like."

Drysdale read it over twice, frowned, and without more ado put it into the fire.

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"You don't mind? He must have been half-mad to write such a note, and we will forget it. Now tell me all about it."

She was sitting in his big padded office chair, and he found a curious pleasure in seeing her there.

"But do you mean to tell me," he said presently, "that you are all alone? That he left you to do battle with the world alone, and at your age?"

"He is only nineteen," said Dorothea, flashing into sudden defence of Hugh, "and young even for his age. He—you see—I am older."

"By about a year, I suppose," said Drysdale bitterly.

He was a lonely man without home-ties, and he often craved for what Hugh had carelessly thrust aside. And to his old-fashioned ideas it seemed altogether wrong that a girl of Dorothea's years and beauty should have to earn her own living and live alone.

"The loneliness would not matter, though I have never tried it," said Dorothea, "if I only knew he was safe and with desirable companions; perhaps I did not do all I might, though," her lip quivered. "I tried to."

"I am sure you did," said Drysdale. "He must have fallen into bad hands. He never had anything to do with the other clerks here out of office hours, I believe, they are all much older. When you hear from him, tell him from me that the debt is cancelled; he is too young to have a weight like that hanging over him, and I assure you that the sum means nothing to me."

"You are very kind, wonderfully kind," said Dorothea, "but it means a great deal to me. I thought it all out in the night, and if you will give me time——"

Drysdale rose and went over to the fireplace.

"But you are not your brother's keeper," he said. "Do you mean that you are taking his debt upon your shoulders?"

There was such evident disapproval in his tone that Dorothea, too, rose and faced him with determination in every line of her slim figure.

"I shall certainly never be happy until the debt is cancelled in the only possible way."

"I could not entertain such an idea for a moment," he said with equal decision.

For a moment they faced one another in silence.

"You would not *dare* to say that to a man," said Dorothea, with quiet passion. "Do you suppose that a debt of honour is any less intolerable to a woman? Can you not understand that I would rather give up all that makes life pleasant, work day and night, to free myself and him. You would do it yourself."

"That is what I fear," he said quietly. "You would deny yourself so much, too much; I know what women are in such a case. Yes, I should do it myself," he hesitated, and Dorothea seized her advantage.

"You will?" coming a little closer. "You have been so kind, be a little kinder still——"

"Since it distresses you," he began, but Dorothea did not wait for more. She thrust a small oblong case into his hand.

"The first instalment," she said almost cheerfully, as for a moment the burden seemed to lighten.

"Open it, please."

He pressed the spring and disclosed a small string of pearls with a diamond clasp.

"They are real," said Dorothea, a delicate pink of excitement displacing the pallor of her cheeks, "and my own. They are worth, I believe, nearly two hundred pounds."

Drysdale snapped the case. He was a judge of pearls.

"Rather more I should say," he remarked drily, and handed them back to her.

"You will not take them? They are really my own, and were my mother's and grandmother's before me."

"I thought so; they are heirlooms."

"They are not," said Dorothea, her lip quivering, then she turned aside.

He glanced at the downcast face and frowned perplexedly. He had never been in such an embarrassing position before, and he suddenly felt an absolute brute for refusing.

"Suppose you leave them with me?" he said, "and I will keep them until you can redeem them."

"That will be never," said Dorothea, cheerful once again. "You will get them valued and take the money. Oh, and there is one other thing."

Like a veritable woman she pursued her advantage.

"I brought this too, and it will leave ninety-five."

Drysdale reddened like a schoolboy, and quickly drew back, evading the crisp note.

"My dear Miss Carmichael, there are limits."

Dorothea puckered her brows perplexedly.

"You are really angry this time," she said. "I am sorry, and won't worry you any more now. I can never repay all your kindness and patience."

She began to button her glove preparatory to departure.

"I must give you an acknowledgment," he said, going over to the writing table.

"Please don't trouble," said Dorothea, in an unbusinesslike manner. "I can trust you."

"Will you promise me that if ever you are in need of a friend you will consult me?"

"You are very kind," said Dorothea, "when the debt is paid——"

"Try to forget that miserable sum of money."

"That is impossible," said Dorothea; and the next moment, with a little nod and smile, she was gone.

Drysdale stood for some moments surveying the empty office chair. Then he opened the jewel case and fingered the pearls very gently, laying them out on his palm.

Probably her one piece of jewellery.

He unlocked a drawer, and placed the case carefully beside a small miniature of his mother, who had died at the age of nineteen. He glanced at the girlish face, fancied he could trace in it a likeness to Dorothea, then paused a moment. She had left no address.

"She will come again," he told himself, after trying in vain to ascertain it. But though in the next three months he received two instalments of five pounds each signed Dorothea Carmichael, there was no address.

He studied the post-mark; it was the Strand.

He wearied himself to death at musical evenings; he searched the papers for concert announcements. He was serious in all his undertakings, and in love for the first time very seriously.

For the next two months there was no communication, and then he feared all manner of misfortunes.

She might be ill; alone in rooms; depriving herself of necessaries; she was that kind of girl, he told himself; and, as a matter of fact, he was very near the mark.

Then one day some blessed chance led him to pay a long deferred visit to an artist friend in Chelsea.

It was June now, and a clear, cool day with streamers of white across the blue sky. The river was full of craft, a tug was towing a string of gaudily-painted barges under one of the bridges.

He stopped for a moment to watch them, then turned, and saw Dorothea coming towards him slowly in the sunlight.

A pale and thin Dorothea, but herself none the less.

"You have been ill," he said, taking her hand, and forgetting a more ceremonious greeting.

Dorothea flushed, and then grew deadly pale.

"I am out for the first time," she said. "It was nothing; a touch of influenza and then pneumonia, and I cannot shake it off, try as I will."

Tears of weakness rose in her eyes; he was indescribably shocked at the change in her.

"You have no right to be out alone," he said.

"There is no one——" began Dorothea;

NEXT WEEK'S COVER DEPICTS ANOTHER STRIKING INCIDENT IN OUR NEW SERIAL.

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then bit her lip and flushed, looking away from him at the barges in the river. It was so much to her to see a friendly face, and his, keen and kindly and full of concern, were so emphatically trustworthy.

They had that part of the Embankment to themselves, and were now slowly pacing along in a sudden silence that meant much to both.

"I wish you would take my arm," said Drysdale abruptly.

Dorothea coloured, and shook her head.

"I am much better now," she said. "The quiet and the sunshine are doing me good, and perhaps—yes—the sight of a friendly face of one's own kind. My landlady is well-intentioned according to her lights, but my room is very hot and airless. I am glad, and sorry, to have met you."

"I hope the gladness predominates?"

"Yes," said Dorothea, "though if I were a well-regulated person I suppose the sight of you would be painful to me."

Drysdale looked down at her with a smile that made his grave face very attractive.

"How thankful I feel that you are not well regulated."

Dorothea was looking across the river to the trees on the opposite bank.

"I intended, I wanted"—her voice faltered. "It is so long since I sent——"

"Is that paltry sum of money always to come between us and our friendship?" he exclaimed hotly, then checked himself. "We are going to be friends?"

"Yes," said Dorothea, with a piteous attempt at resolution. "Afterwards!"

"Now," he said curtly. "You have more than paid the debt; am I not the richer by a pearl necklace?"

Dorothea smiled faintly.

"You have it still? I meant you to sell it if you liked."

"But you did not think I should?"

She shook her head.

"I have it locked safely away in a drawer at my office where I keep a little miniature of the mother I never knew. I should like you to see it one day."

"Thank you," said Dorothea.

Her head was turned aside; he could only see the thin oval of her cheek.

"What do you do without the little necklace when you go out in the evening? I wish you would let me send it back to you."

"I never go out now," said Dorothea incautiously. "You see my voice deserted me for a time, and engagements are few and far between: one drops out somehow."

He put two and two together with wonderful rapidity.

"Now listen to me," he said severely. "I am just double your age"—it was a sum he had gone over not once but many times—"and you have no one else to tell you that you are killing yourself by inches. You do not seem to care whether you live or die." Dorothea's face quivered.

"Why should I care?" she said, with a sudden passionate intensity, as the control of months broke down. "Who is there to care whether I live or die? I am ashamed to meet the few friends I had. It is the loneliness that is so intolerable; the feeling that no one in the breadth of London cares."

Drysdale studied the kerb, his keen face had suddenly grown very gentle.

"I suppose you would hardly believe me if I said I cared," he remarked quietly. "That in the length and breadth of London you are the one being I have thought of and searched for this many a day? However, we will leave that point for the present. There is a cab lurking about for a fare; let us have lunch together as a bond of good fellowship."

His voice and bearing had changed again.

"No," said Dorothea firmly; but her face had flushed into a new beauty. "My lunch is waiting for me."

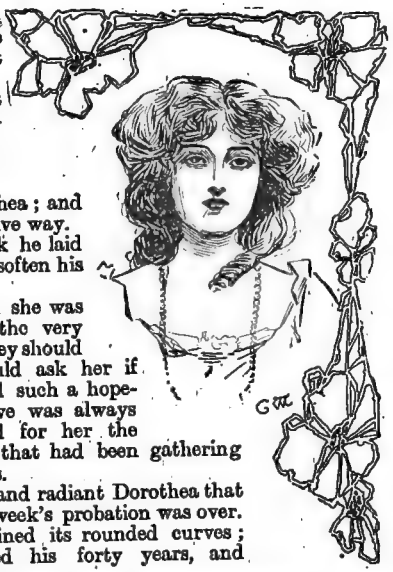
"A good one?"

"Excellent," she spoke mendaciously, and afterwards ate rice pudding and bread and butter with some compunction.

"You will give me your address this time?"

She suddenly flushed a painful crimson.

"I have left the flat, and it is better, you must not come. You will trust me?"



"I will, if you promise to meet me here to-morrow at the same time."

"This day next week," said Dorothea; "just for a few minutes."

"To-morrow."

"No," said Dorothea; and he had perforce to give way.

All that long week he laid plans by which to soften his obdurate debtor.

He was alone and she was alone; it seemed the very irony of fate that they should be apart. He would ask her if twenty years seemed such a hopeless disparity. Love was always young, and he had for her the stored-up affection that had been gathering all these lonely years.

It was a changed and radiant Dorothea that met him when the week's probation was over. Her face had regained its rounded curves; he suddenly realised his forty years, and sighed involuntarily.

She put a letter into his hand—breathlessly, without waiting for another greeting.

"It is from Hugh," she said; "he is in America. And see, he has sent ten dollars as a first instalment. He is working on a farm. Perhaps it will be the making of him. Such an affectionate letter!"

Drysdale read it, while she looked over his shoulder and read it too, though she knew every word by heart.

"And now I suppose we may be friends?" asked Drysdale; and as he spoke he drew out a small oblong case.

"Yes," said Dorothea.

"And you will take it back?"

Together they looked at the little string of pearls lying on his palm.

"Yes," said Dorothea again, "as a gift from you. It is yours to do with as you like."

"Dorothea, am I too old to be more than a friend?"

"Old," exclaimed Dorothea indignantly, "you are not old."

"Older than yourself by twenty years," he said slowly; "and twenty years means a great difference."

The Embankment was quite deserted.

Dorothea began with apparent absence of mind to twist the little necklace round his fingers. Then she inserted her own and looked up, her eyes shining through a happy mist.

"Some people might think so," she said softly, "but what does it matter when we do not agree with them."

J. M. B.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

The Narrative of Ruth Cordelvin.

"The discovery has not prostrated me with horror, as it might have been expected to do, because, as a matter of fact, I had prepared myself for the worst. But the confirmation of my fears has opened my eyes to the vile character of Roderick Vanstone. He is a man absolutely without scruple, a man without one atom of morality—an iniquitous monster.

"Yet I am powerless to end his evil-doing. For the haunting idea of my life grows and grows. I fear to speak to the police, for surely that would lead to my own examination and incarceration. Some day, perhaps, I shall conquer the great repugnance I have, and boldly tell the whole truth to those who should know it. Meanwhile I can watch the monster. . . . I have brought my poor brother's amputated limb home, and have carefully preserved it in spirits—have put it 'in pickle,' as the doctors used to say years ago in Melbourne, when I was a nurse at the hospital there. In this way I can keep the arm, so that if the time ever comes for identification purposes, I shall be ready.

"There is much in this business which I cannot understand. According to the papers, the dead body of Felix Cordelvin has been discovered, minus an arm, among the ruins of Moulstone Castle. I am startled. Can Vanstone have killed my brother and conveyed his body to the place named? It is a matter I must investigate at once. If he has dared to kill poor Felix, why then, nothing will remain for me to do than——

"Thank Heaven! I have been down to Moulstone. I have seen the body of the dead man. It is not my brother, although everybody thinks it is, and truly the resemblance is striking. . . . But the discovery that it is not my brother brings with it a puzzle to confront me. What is the mystery in all this? Why has my brother been kidnapped, and why has another man been put in his place Plainly it is for the purpose of mixing identities. But with what object? That I have no means at present of knowing. Later, perhaps, I shall learn. Now I can only carefully watch and wait.

"Another incident has occurred to add to my wonder. Last night I encountered Gerald Mortimer again—the same man whom I met some days ago at Moulstone. I was on the Embankment, in London, at the time, whither I had gone after following the two Vanstones to the Savoy Hotel, where they dined. While I paced up and down the Embankment a thick fog came on, and, getting tired of waiting, I was trying to find my way to Temple station. This, in the dense fog, was not an easy task, and I had to ask my way of the first person I met. To my utter astonishment this proved to be Gerald Mortimer. He recognised me, too, and got quite importunate with questions. He seemed to suspect me, and I began to be afraid. Fortunately, however, in my satchel I had some sand, which I always carry, and I blinded him with this and so got away. But the encounter has made me nervous; I fear that this man may meet me again at any moment and give me in charge of the police; for, he evidently thinks I have something to do with the murder at Moulstone. Although, of course, this is not so, I am still afraid, because if I come into contact with the police they will, I am sure, have me shut up.

"Last night was eventful again. I had previously sent Vanstone an anonymous letter, intending to give him a scare. I hinted broadly that what he had buried in the shrubbery was no longer there. So last night I went over to Brixton Hill to watch the result of my letter. Everything turned out just as I expected. Late at night the two Vanstones issued from the house and at once made for the shrubbery. They dug at the same spot where they had buried my brother's arm. I could see them hard at work, and I could hear their mumbling as occasionally they paused for a few moments' rest. I was not near enough to hear exactly what they said, but I shall never forget the look upon their faces of mingled amazement and terror when they discovered that the arm was really gone. It so gratified me to frighten these two villains that I could not restrain my inclination to laugh aloud. I did laugh, two or three times, and then the younger Vanstone came after me. I ran away towards the gate, but he ran too fast, and overtook me. He questioned me, and would have attacked me, I think, but I had provided myself with a revolver, and I kept him off with that. Then the elder Vanstone came up, and he was about to take hold of me, but once again a handful of sand thrown into his eyes disabled him for a time, and in the confusion that ensued I made my escape through the gate. I am really pleased with myself for the scare I have given them. I shall scare them a good many times more, I hope. But I shall have to be very careful, for now they will doubtless try to get me in their clutches. . . . But all these things, after all, are side issues, and the main problem still confronts me: Why have they kidnapped my brother? What are they going to do with him? My head aches with anxiety. Oh, if I only had the courage to go to the police!"

* * * * *

Inspector Trench laid down his pen. He had come to the last of the entries in Ruth Cordelvin's diary, and had copied out the valuable portions thereof. He filled his pipe, leant back in his chair, and with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, set to thinking. His mouth was hard set, his brow contracted.

"Well," he murmured to himself, after a full ten minutes' pondering, "there's only one thing to be done; these two Vanstones will have to be arrested. I don't know where they are, but, if needs be, the world will have to be ransacked rom end to end to find them. Good Heavens! What a pair of scoundrels! Ruth Cordelvin didn't know some of the things I know, otherwise she would never have been puzzled about the dead man found at Moulstone. Now that I've read her narrative, everything is as plain as a pikestaff. Let's just run over the case. One man—Anthony Cordelvin—is rich; but owing to mental incapacity his estates are managed by Roderick Vanstone. As long as Anthony Cordelvin lives, Vanstone can do as he likes, practically—can play ducks and drakes with Cordelvin's money; and he's just the sort of man to do it.

"But supposing Anthony Cordelvin dies, then Miss Penhurst, the next heir, steps in, and Roderick Vanstone is

deposed. Well, assuming that Vanstone *has* played ducks and drakes with the Cordelvin money, he is faced with rather a serious difficulty. To him the life of Anthony Cordelvin is everything—his death would be calamitous. Assuming once more, then, that Anthony Cordelvin falls ill, Vanstone gets into a dreadful funk. If Cordelvin dies, Vanstone will be ruined, and disgraced, and punished.

"But Vanstone isn't going to submit tamely; moreover, he is a man of resource. If there is a way to cheat justice, he will do it. He knows that Anthony Cordelvin has a cousin named Felix Cordelvin; and he knows, too, that Felix has come to England from Australia, and has got shut up in Moulstone Asylum. He is aware also—*and this is the most vital point*—that the two Cordelvins bear a striking resemblance one to the other. If anything happens to Anthony, Felix can fill his place.

"But as it is uncertain when Anthony will die, it might be just a little bit difficult to put Felix in his place just at the right moment. What is the remedy? Simply this: that he must kidnap Felix Cordelvin at once, and get him to his—Vanstone's—house. Then Anthony Cordelvin must die. To die naturally, of course, would be the best—but he must die; and he must be taken and placed in the neighbourhood of Moulstone Asylum, so that when his body is discovered the asylum people will take it for granted that the dead man is the patient who escaped a few days before—Felix Cordelvin. The similarity between the cousins is sufficient to guarantee the success of such a plan. Once bring that about—get Anthony buried as Felix—then, of course, it will be easy for Felix to live with Vanstone as Anthony.

"There!" exclaimed the detective to himself, after thus reviewing the case; "that's about the length and breadth of the whole business, I think. There are one or two little things which I can't account for—a join here and there which won't dovetail—but I fancy my theory is pretty near the mark. And now, having satisfied myself, and finished my pipe, I think I'll go to bed."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Struggle on the Cliff.

To travellers by boat down the Thames estuary a sight is observable, on the starboard side, of two twin towers, built a great while ago, and known to all the world of visitors to Kentish watering-places, as the Reculvers.

Upon a stone slab among the ruins of the church of which the towers alone remain intact, sat two men—Roderick and Stephen Vanstone. Both looked careworn, both looked dusty and travel-stained. From Birchington, distant some miles, they had walked that morning.

Exactly why they had come to this desolate spot, neither could have told. Mile after mile they had walked in brooding silence, and now, while they rested after their toilsome journey, the atmosphere of gloomy foreboding still surrounded them.

Suddenly Stephen Vanstone moved in his seat and shivered.

"Why have we come here?" he demanded almost fiercely. "Why have we come to this cold and gloomy place?"

His father answered him not a word.

"Do you hear?" repeated the younger man with another shiver. "Why have you brought me to this place?"

Roderick Vanstone raised his chin from off his breast, and heaved a deep sigh.

"I haven't brought you here, Stephen," he retorted. "I had no idea of coming here when we started. But we walked on and on, and—well, as we *are* here, perhaps it's as good a place as any. Such a desolate spot as this—where the houses are few and people scarce, may be safer for us than elsewhere."

"Safer for *us!*" said the other angrily. "Look here, guv'nor, all along you've connected me with this infernal business, when, as a matter of fact, I've had little to do with it."

"Whatever has been done," gloomily rejoined the elder man, "has been done with your knowledge, and largely for your sake."

"Oh, it's all very fine to say that now we're in this pickle."

(Continued on page 636.)

French Girl or English Girl.

Which is the Prettier Dancer?

French maids are renowned for their vivaciousness in dancing; English damsels for their stateliness. The question is, which characteristic is most pleasing. An important point, however, which must not be overlooked, is that of health and strength. No person can dance well unless in absolute good health. Languor or dizziness—which invariably rise out of indigestion—are ailments which make life miserable and devoid of happiness. Bile Beans for Biliousness, however, are a certain cure for these ailments, and also for skin eruptions, pimples, and all blood impurities. Proof of this is given in the case of Mr. George Blanchard, of Morley Street, Kettering, recently interviewed by a *Kettering Guardian* reporter, and he told, for the purpose of publication, the following startling facts:

"It will be seventeen years ago that first I began to suffer from indigestion. This became chronic, and in the end I was brought down to the threshold of death." I had acute pains in the stomach and right side, with continual belching and rifting, and with occasional vomiting of my food. Sometimes in the morning I should feel fairly well, but before I got to work the pains would come on. I should also be taken with dizziness, and would perspire terribly. Sometimes I was so bad that my mates used to say, 'He'll die at work.' At other times I should be unable to go to my work for a week or a fortnight at a time. All this while I was losing flesh. I could only take liquid food, and I became so wasted that my limbs were like those of a baby. The doctor said he could do nothing for me, and I should never again be better. I fully believed that I was about to die. Owing to my acute sufferings life has lost its pleasures, and death had lost the terrors it would have for a healthy person. At this climax my wife read about Bile Beans for Biliousness, and the wonderful cures they had effected. We had some procured and I took them. By the time I had finished the second box I felt a great deal better. Bit by bit they improved me, and my spirits began to revive. I became so vastly improved that I could once more digest solid food. The pains after eating, the dizziness, and all the other symptoms of my long illness gradually disappeared—my strength increased, I regained the flesh I had lost, and could once more eat and enjoy my meals. I am now perfectly restored to health, and can do a hard day's work. A few months back I could not bear anyone to even touch me on the chest, but now, look here! (Here Mr. Blanchard beat his chest energetically). It seems impossible to believe that so great a change could be brought about in any man as Bile Beans have effected in me," he continued; "and I sometimes wonder what the doctors who attended me, and gave me up, would say if they could see me now." Such is the record of this wonderful case. Bile Beans for Biliousness, which effected the above cure, are unequalled for all cases of indigestion of however long standing. They are also a certain cure for dizziness, pains in the back and chest, loss of appetite, weakness, flatulence, colds, chills, liver and kidney disorders, sleeplessness, palpitation, anæmia, all female ailments, constipation, piles, and as a preventative of influenza. Obtainable of all chemists, or post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 and 120 London Wall, London, E.C., upon receipt of prices, one and three-halfpence or two and nine.

"Well, well, Stephen, my boy, since we are in this pickle, don't let's quarrel. We've got clear from Brixton Hill—that's something. Warrants are out for our arrests—all the papers say so—but the police don't know where we are. That's *some* consolation, isn't it?"

"Precious little consolation in this!" growled the younger man, shivering again with cold and trepidation. "Precious little consolation to be hunted like some wild beast—to have to keep out of the way of prying eyes—to be obliged to avoid people who might want to converse! It may be consolation to you, who have brought all this about, but it's very little to me, I assure you."

The father's eyes flashed angrily at his son's bitter words. But he restrained himself and answered nothing.

"Just because," the son went on, "you have chosen for years past to take money which wasn't yours, and to let your crimes get you into a mess from which you could only be extricated by committing greater crimes—it's pretty hard luck to be coupled with you."

Again the father's eyes flashed. Still he spoke no word. Stephen Vanstone's wrath increased at the other's silence.

"It's bad enough," he continued, "to have for a father a man who's a thief and a murderer, but to——"

Further words were strangled in the younger man's throat. For, stung to fury by what had been said, Roderick Vanstone had sprung up and thrown himself upon his son.

In a moment Stephen Vanstone realised his peril. In his parent's eyes there was a frenzy of madness; through his tightly clenched teeth there trickled round the corners of his lips a ghastly froth.

With a great effort Stephen tried to throw his father off. But in vain. The grip upon his throat tightened, and all he could do was to clutch the elder man's wrist and shoulder. By this means he was able in some measure to maintain his balance and to prevent his father from obtaining complete mastery over him.

Thus they strove one with the other—staggering hither and thither among the ancient tombs, and inwardly consumed with a fierce unnatural hatred. Though ordinarily, Stephen, by virtue of his youth, could have overpowered his father, yet now, the latter, in his paroxysm of frenzied madness, seemed to be endowed with triple strength.

Slowly and surely he bore his son back, back, till between them and the brown beach far below, was nothing but the railing which topped the steep cliff upon which the ruins stood.

Instinctively Stephen Vanstone realised his imminent peril. Fiercely he struggled to press his father back, gurgling out a curse as he did so. No use! For Roderick Vanstone was in the very throes of homicidal mania. Backward, inch by inch, he pushed his son; then, without relinquishing his terrible grip on the throat, which was turning the younger man's face purple, he suddenly grasped his son round the body, and, with a mighty effort, lifted him over the rails and hurled him down.

Then, as his chest heaved with his violent exertion, he clutched the rails with both his hands, and leant forward over them, trying to peer down.

A moment later the sounds of voices giving forth excited shouts behind him, made him turn.

Three men were approaching—a coastguard and two others. They advanced at a run.

Roderick Vanstone looked about him for a means of escape, but the men were now too close. So, with his back to the railing, he stood quietly awaiting them. His jaw, previously set, had dropped now; his eyes, which just before, were blazing with madness, had dulled to a lead colour; his arms and hands, previously imbued with unnatural strength and energy, hung limp and nerveless at his side; his head sank on to his breast.

The newcomers, who had witnessed the final deed of his madness, halted in amazement at his passive demeanour. One of the men, recovering his presence of mind, demanded what he had done. Roderick Vanstone merely replied in a voice that seemed choked—

"I have killed him. Take me! I have killed my son."

There were shouts and murmurings from the foot of the cliff now—for others had rushed to the spot upon which Stephen Vanstone had been cast—shouts and murmurings as of men startled and horrified by sudden tragedy. In one brief moment the life had been dashed out of Stephen Vanstone!

Without a word more, without the least show of resistance, with only silent shaping of his lips and slow dazed movement of his eyes, Roderick Vanstone was taken to a place of security, pending the arrival of the police.

* * * * *

On the bed in the infirmary of a great prison lies a man sorely sick—sick unto death.

Those who knew the man, hale and vigorous, a few months before, would surely now never recognise him as Roderick Vanstone.

But he it is. White is his hair, thin and pallid his face, lean and attenuated his limbs. Vainly have the prison doctors tried to

> . . Minister to a mind diseas'd,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
> And with some sweet oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart.

The sickness of Roderick Vanstone was too subtle, too deep for physic. He was now doomed to die. Under the ban of death in any case he was; for twelve good men and true had found him guilty of murder—double murder; the murder by strychnia poisoning of Anthony Cordelvin, and the murder of his own son; and a robed judge had given utterance to the most solemn of formal legal decrees, donning the black cap as he did so. But in the intervening days that remained for Roderick Vanstone to live, this mortal sickness had stricken him, and now threatened to come between the man who had so sinned against his fellows, and the gallows.

Roderick Vanstone was doomed to die, and he did die. But, ere the last signs of lingering life passed out of his body, he had emptied his guilt-laden mind into the ears of an ever-sympathetic chaplain.

To the latter he told everything—everything relating to himself which has been told herein—and more. Of all his extensive defalcations he spoke, of his fear of discovery, of his desperate resort, when Anthony Cordelvin fell ill, to kill him, and to put in his place Felix Cordelvin, the cousin who so closely resembled him.

Inspector Trench, too, was present by the bedside when the statement was made, and he, in his turn, was able to communicate the full facts to Gerald Mortimer and Dr. Branksome.

The detective read over to them his extracts from Ruth Cordelvin's diary, and explained to them how the substitution of Felix for Anthony Cordelvin had been effected.

"Roderick Vanstone," he said, "was almost alone in knowing of the remarkable likeness between the two cousins. He planned the substitution some months before it was brought about. He was a desperate man, you see, and when Anthony Cordelvin fell ill, he at once arranged for the kidnapping of Felix, bribing a warder at the asylum and getting him away as the diary shows. Once Felix was in Vanstone's house, Vanstone promptly administered an overdose of strychnia to Anthony, and then, with the help of his son and his two men-servants, Stebbings and Burge, who are now, as you know, doing long terms for their part in the affair, he managed to convey the body of Anthony Cordelvin to the ruins, where it was found. How he did this didn't come out at the trial, but he told the chaplain and myself. The body was brought down in a huge case which was supposed to contain a piano. The case was afterwards smashed up, and the wood of which it was made thrown into the river."

"But there is one thing," remarked Gerald, "which I can't quite make out. I know, of course, from the trial, that Anthony Cordelvin had been minus an arm for many years, and that, in order to complete the substitution of the two men,

(*Concluded on page 639.*)

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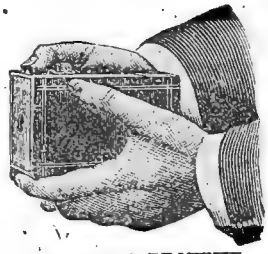

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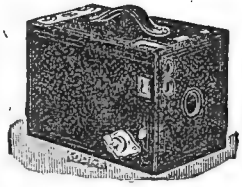

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Dr. Manisty amputated the arm of Felix Cordelvin. But, if you remember, when the body was found in the ruins the missing arm had evidently been *hacked* off, not amputated by a surgeon."

"Oh! that was done by Vanstone himself," explained Inspector Trench. "Don't you see, if the body had been discovered with merely an amputated arm, it would have been possible for the doctors to have told at once that it wasn't the man they thought it to be. As Dr. Branksome here will tell you, it is possible to tell, within a reasonable time, the date of an amputation; and it was, of course, known in the asylum that both Felix Cordelvin's arms were sound. Therefore, the only way for Roderick Vanstone to make his fraud complete, was to sever the arm above the previous amputation, and make it look as if after the man had been murdered, the murderer had cut off an arm as an additional act of butchery."

"Well," murmured Gerald Mortimer, "it has been a terrible business—the most terrible that I've ever heard of. But it is all over now, thank goodness, and I suppose we may forgive the principals. Roderick Vanstone killed Anthony Cordelvin, and killed his own son—and now he is dead himself. Burge and Stebbings, his accomplices, are in prison for long terms, and that poor, miserable catspaw of his, Dr. Manisty, is likewise suffering the penalty of his wrongdoing. Have you heard how Felix Cordelvin is, Inspector?"

"Yes, I heard the other day," answered the detective. "Since the murder of his sister and his subsequent confinement at Broadmoor, he is strangely altered, they say. Mad enough, of course, to warrant his life-long incarceration, he is yet sane enough to know what he has done. His grief as he recalls the circumstances of his sister's death is, I am told, dreadful to see; his life seems to be one long fit of agonised repentance. Ah, me! it's a strange world."

* * * * *

It is a lovely day in early summer—a bright, happy June day—all sunshine, blooming hedgerows, green trees, and singing birds. We are at Moulstone again; but Moulstone under quite a different aspect. Now on this morning there are no terrorised villagers thrilled by stories of escapes from the asylum, or murders among the Castle ruins.

At the Manor House all is excitement still; but to-day it is the excitement of happiness—happiness caused by the all-absorbing topic of everybody in the place, an inkling of which is heralded to the neighbourhood by the bells of the old ivy-clad church away yonder on the hill.

Merry marriage-bells indeed they are, and they are heard here in Moulstone—the bridegroom's home—because the bride herself, Nina Penhurst, is fatherless and motherless. For Nina is indeed the bride and Gerald Mortimer the bridegroom. The happiest bride and bridegroom in the world they are, and, if the unanimous testimony of the village goes for anything, the handsomest.

Sufferings they have endured in the past—sufferings out of the usual run. But all are over now. The dark cloud which but a few months before overshadowed both their young lives, is removed; the golden future beckons them forward with promises of sunshine and peace. Both realise that happiness is now to be their portion, and, as they stand upon the altar steps side by side, with heads bent in reverence, both their hearts swell in joyful gratitude to that benign Providence which has brought them out of the dark days of experience into the glad days of mutual love and trust.

THE END.

TO THOSE WHO WRITE.

A Prize of One Guinea will be paid every week by the Editor for the best short story sent in by any of his readers. Contributions should not be less than 1,500 words in length, and not more than 3,000. The Editor reserves to himself the right to publish any contribution submitted. Stamped addressed envelopes must be enclosed for the return of the stories, but, while every care will be taken, the Editor cannot hold himself responsible for possible loss of MSS.

RESULT OF TOWNS NAME-HUNTING COMPETITION.

A HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIVE competitors sent in correct lists of solutions, so the prizes have all been lumped together, and the £16, to which 2s. 11d. has been added, has been divided, each competitor receiving 2s. 7d. Lists of winners can be had on application. Below are given the solutions:

1, Canterbury; 2, Aldershot; 3, Dunstable; 4, Harrogate; 5, Leek; 6, Wakefield; 7, Bannockburn; 8, Middleton; 9, Wellington; 10, Poole; 11, Runcorn; 12, Risca; 13, Sevenoaks; 14, Bridgend; 15, Oldham; 16, Chislehurst; 17, Kew; 18, Hackney; 19, Guildford; 20, Slough; 21, Queenstown; 22, Bath; 23, Ware; 24, Margate; 25, Liversedge; 26, Featherstone; 27, Stirling; 28, Blaydon; 29, Horbury; 30, Mallow; 31, Sligo; 32, Hastings; 33, Sunderland; 34, Sale; 35, Grays; 36, Bray; 37, Deal; 38, Broadstairs; 39, Rhyl: 40, Dukinfield.

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

The Inferior Half.

"K. T. R." is his uncle's heir in a business, but has fallen in love with one of the employées. He has not mentioned it to her, but believes she returns his sentiment. He knows his parents would not sanction an engagement. How should he act? I imagine from your handwriting, "K. T. R.," that you have not yet arrived at years of discretion. I think you should continue not to say anything at all to the girl. There is, of course, no reason why a future proprietor of a business should not marry an employée, but you are too young as yet to know whether the girl would make you the wife you will need when your position becomes a good one.

There are many cases of the sons of large employers falling in love with and marrying factory girls, but I do not know of one case in which such a marriage has been a success. It is worse for a man to marry beneath him in the social scale than for a woman to do so, as one's relations look much more askance on a wife lacking in refinement and breeding than a husband, whose success in business is held to exempt him from criticism of his social standing. Beware, "K. T. R.," of marrying a girl you think you may live to be ashamed of. It will spell unhappiness for both of you in years to come. So wait a time and see if you think of her in the same way a year hence.

❦❦❦

The Fatal Number Three.

I have had many letters, I am sorry to say, from married men who confide in me their attachments to women other than their wives. I am far from being so narrow-minded as to say that it is unnatural for married people to form other attachments after a year or so of married life. Unfortunately such cases are only too frequent. But my correspondents must understand that no advice is possible as to their procedure under such circumstances. The only condemnation I have to offer is that they should have allowed themselves to even consider the possibility of forming attachments for those from whom they are barred by law.

In connection with this question I must tell "F. E. W." (a married man) that he has done very wrong indeed in making love to a girl and keeping from her the fact that he was married. He must at once tell her the truth, or the consequences will afterwards be fatal for both of them. No right-minded girl can have any regard for a man who has thus deceived her, and it is better that "F. E. W." should part from her on terms of esteem than contempt, which she must undoubtedly entertain for him when the truth leaks out. At the same time I am sorry for both my correspondent, his wife, and the girl he professes to love, that their relations with each other are so hardly grouped by Fate.

❦❦❦

Cures Wanted.

"Lena" has a young man who is continually making bad puns. She endured this for a time, but the habit is beginning to pall on her. She asks me how she can cure him of the habit. I can imagine no better way than for "Lena" to let him "hear himself as others hear him," by indulging in bad puns herself for a while just to let him see what agony can be caused from the practice.

A similar complaint comes from "Saxon," who is engaged to a girl who has a fatal gift of mimicry. No matter who it is, she finds some characteristic about them which she at once imitates. "Saxon" fears that this habit may develop in after life to the detriment of their happiness. I don't think "Saxon" need very much fear this. Mimicry is largely a survival of a schoolgirl habit, and when married, he will find his sweetheart will probably drop it. At the same time, if clever, mimicry adds no small enjoyment to life, provided always it is humorous and not malicious in intent.

❦❦❦

Influence.

"Bessie" wants to get employment as a stewardess on a liner, and wishes to know what procedure to take. Like everything else, it is very necessary to bring one's name before the company through the aid of a friend having influence. The applications for employment of this kind are so numerous that companies rarely engage persons whose credentials are not known to them. As "Bessie" has a friend who is a retired naval commander, she should get him to write to the companies on her behalf, and perhaps in that way it will be possible to get her application considered. Advertisements of this character occasionally appear in shipping papers, a list of which will be found in the directory, and "Bessie" should carefully study these.

❦❦❦

A Case for Resistance.

Certainly, "G. S.," you should stand out against attaching yourself to a lady thirty years your senior. For your parents to attempt to link you, a youth of nineteen, to one more than old enough to be your mother, because of her money, is quite preposterous. I should not be so emphatic were you six years older, and able to decide whether a marriage with a middle-aged woman would be satisfactory to you, but as yet you can scarcely realise what such a match entails, and should not on any account lend yourself to it. If the lady likes you sufficiently well to offer to adopt you, you might accept the suggestion with advantage. Many young men have worked their way into professions as a result of patronage of this kind. But marriage should be out of the question.

❦❦❦

The Bird in the Bush.

"Eva" has been engaged to Jack for a year, but has grown tired of him. He is one of those unsuspicious beings who have never dreamt of such a possibility, taking her continued devotion to him as a matter of course. However, she has no doubt in her mind now that she could never be happy with Jack, in spite of his good qualities, as, to put it frankly, he bores her. Now Tom has appeared on the scene, and she has fallen in love with him, but he shows no signs of reciprocating. This she believes is due to his unwillingness to trespass in Jack's preserves. Should she break off her engagement with Jack, in the hope that Tom returns her love?

If "Eva" feels that she cannot be happy with Jack, she should, in my opinion, break off the engagement. To marry him and not care for him must be the prelude to trouble. As to her intimacy with Tom, that should follow a distinct severance with Jack. If Tom really cares for her, he will make advances on hearing of her breach with Jack, but will certainly not do so until the engagement has been broken off. It is, of course, a terrible thing to have to break off an engagement, but a temporary blow to one is better than a permanent disunion between two.

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